

THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING MAGAZINE OF CULT ENTERTAINMENT

STARRBURST

ISSUE
400



LANDMARK SPECIAL



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EVIDENCE

THE CAMERA NEVER LIES

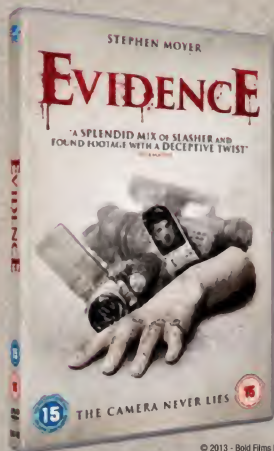


THE EXAMINER

FROM THE
ACCLAIMED DIRECTOR OF
'THE FOURTH KIND'

"A SPLENDID MIX OF
SLASHER AND FOUND FOOTAGE
WITH A DECEPTIVE TWIST"

THE EXAMINER



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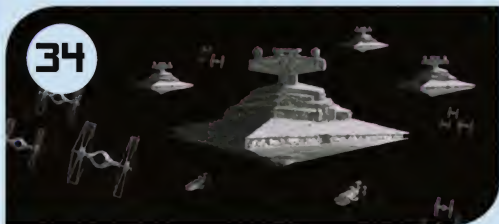
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MAY 2014

ISSUE
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LIZARD

STARBURST HQ is grateful for the protection of our faithful reader TETSUO. A rebel survivor from the Ice Reptilian Wars of the 30s, TETSUO remains vigilant to this day, upholding his promise to protect all of mankind from the ever present threat of reptilian evil.

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Starburst is printed in the UK by HENDON PRESS LTD, Tring Road, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 2JA.

Distributed by MARKETFORCE Blue Fin Building, 110 Southpark Street, London, SE1 0SU
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Starburst Issue 400.

To be honest I have been dreading this issue ever since I took over as Editor. I just knew you guys deserved something really special, and the responsibility for it seemed immense. Myself, Kris and all of the team love this magazine, and we try to show that with every issue. With 400 we have given you an "upgrade", that we hope you will like, and we invite you on a journey with us back to the beginnings of STARBURST, and forward through four decades of genre entertainment.

On behalf of all of us at STARBURST, thanks for picking up this special issue. We hope you stick with us for many years to come.

Keep watching the weird and wonderful...

Jordan M. Royce
EDITOR

FEEDBACK

Well, after a short waiting period [Short? - Ed], the letters page is here! To kick things off we've selected some of our favourites we've received in its absence...

THE BEST THINGS...

I would like to congratulate you on your 400th issue. I have been with STARBURST since issue no 1 and now you have reached another milestone. By the way, when are you bringing back the letters page you promised 2 years ago? Villmore Rochester LONDON

Well Villmore, thank you for the kind words, they're appreciated. As for the letters page? Better late than never we guess...

GOLDEN YEARS

I've been loving the relaunched STARBURST. As a boy, I was an avid reader of Dez Skinn's original from the beginning; the best of its kind, and the new version absolutely reflects that rather than its later incarnation. Some of the original Alien material had a big impact on me back then, and it was a nostalgic blast to see some of it reprinted along with the new material in the previous issue. I hope the magazine continues to go from



twitter

@STARBURST_MAG

So, how's about that new TEENAGE
MUTANT NINJA TURTLES trailer then?

@scottdawg138: will never beat the original movie but its a thumbs up from me!

@TamponTom: I'm not convinced! All through the trailer I was waiting for Optimus prime!

strength to strength. It's great to have it back, just as good as its original golden years.
David Savage

THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH THIS ONE

I felt compelled to contact you after reading the comments you made in STARBURST - regarding the apparent retirement of George Lucas, and the subsequent sale of Lucasfilm Ltd to Disney Studios, and in particular, the incredible amount of negativity directed towards Mr. Lucas.

Firstly, I'd like to applaud the candid way you referred to the 'wankers' (oops, sorry - such candour is clearly infectious) who seem to have incredibly short memories (as well as a severe lack of demonstrable, historical sci-fi knowledge), as they attack a man who - in my opinion - is one of the seminal cinematographers of our time.

Although Star Wars is not my absolute favourite Sci-Fi film (sorry, that one goes to 2001), but it's up there in my top five - after Empire of course), I have to concede that without Mr. Lucas' influence on my life I doubt whether I'd have had any aspirations towards writing within such a competitive and diverse genre.

Maybe, some of these blinkered philistines (believe me, that's me being polite!) should take a brief moment, and have the clarity of mind to consider this fact: Every modern-day film that utilises CGI effects, or miniature work of exceptional quality - regardless of whether or not the film is actually any good, owes a huge debt of gratitude to the man, and should thank the infernal master, or mistress, and his (or her) plethora of fiery minions

- that Lucas had the courage, foresight and determination to rent a warehouse in an LA suburb (back in 1974/5) as he fought to make a picture that was deemed impossible to capture on film, with not a lot of money, whilst developing the next generation of studio models and motion capture technology as they went along.

Clearly I'm referring the near-mythical 'ILM' wing of Lucas' empire, and in turn, the myriad of visual wonder that left its sacred realm for over nearly four decades. Something that was spawned entirely by Lucas' visual genius - and inbuilt desire to create believable special effects.

Once again, I think your comments were brave - considering the strength of feeling behind the wave of ridiculous anti-Lucas sentiment that's festering at the moment, as well as having to consider your own standing within such a notable publication, and the fact that some of these precious little 'loves' might take exception to what you've said; but with that - I believe it needed saying, and you said it perfectly. Bravo!

I also agree that Episode III was pretty damn good, but in my own humble opinion, should have been the starting point for the new trilogy - as opposed to the final act, but what do I know!?

In fact, I don't actually care. George Lucas is an 'untouchable' in my mind, and whilst he, like anyone else, is open to a certain level of criticism, the man, and his influence on modern cinema, should command an unparalleled level of respect that's usually reserved for religious figureheads, as well as Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick!
SMDeeming

DROKK!

It's inexplicable to me why Dredd failed at the US box office. Maybe American audiences just prefer self-indulgent, plot hole ridden snooze fests like TDKR or pointless rehashes like the Spider-Man reboot, that seemed to appeal to the Emo/ Twilight audience.

At least we've got a truly adult comic book movie that doesn't insult an audience's intelligence and for that we should be thankful.

Hopefully the film will also clear up on Blu-ray/DVD and add to the final box office tally.

I would have dearly loved a sequel though!
Ashley Beeching

FEELING GOOD...

It's been a while since I read your mag, but I still remember buying issue 6 as a kid. It had Blake's 7 on the cover, which was what made me pick it up. Similarly, your Dredd cover has brought me back into the fold, as a quick perusal revealed what seems to be the best coverage of all the mags out there. Also, the cover art was pretty cool as well. I love the feel of the magazine itself, which sounds weird but it's true! It feels more solid than a certain other SF magazine, and inside there's more actual articles than pictures, which is refreshing, and no pandering to the teen demographic all over the place. It feels like an SF mag for grown ups, and this grown up will certainly be checking out future issues.

Allan Holloway
SYBIL DANNING'S
SPACE CLEAVAGE

With STARBURST, I go right back to the late '70s when it was, of course, the only UK fantasy news and review magazine, and I loved it for being so. Which, in a very real way, is why I was momentarily confused for a porn peddler in the school playground. True story: while other kids were bringing Action Man and Buckeroo to school on the last day of Summer term, I was bringing in a big pile of STARBURST magazines. I'd dish out the issues to my mates and we'd pore over the various gratuitous action shots from the latest Fulci, Romero or Cronenberg on the

STAR

Karl's the first letters page in a while we're not awarding a star letter this month. From next issue however, our favourite will find its way into the star letter enclosure and it's author will receive a 3 month subscription! All you have to do is write a good great letter and email or post it to us (details at bottom of page). Please include your name and address on any email or letter sent as this makes giving you a prize much easier.

LETTER

school climbing frame. But to the watching be-permed sports teacher we clearly looked like a pack of rabid porn-hounds with a stash of Men Only or Whitehouse. It was a reasonable assumption to make. Next thing I know, a hairy sports-hand appears over my head and snatches my STARBURST. His sneer turns to puzzlement when, instead of a closeup of some unshaven 1970s German minge, he sees an interview with BBC SFX man Matt Irvine about how he built and operated a large mechanical spider for Doctor Who and used hair dryers to make spaceships for Blake's 7. Pretty tame stuff. "Er, yeah, good magazine this," he says sheepishly, handing it back to me. And I felt both pride and relief: pride that I was educating my young friends in the ways of STARBURST (instead of Razzle) and relief that the bastard hadn't caught me looking at the legendary Fantasy Females issue with that shot of Sybil Danning's space cleavage.
Mike Caldwell

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Please note that any Opal Fruit gags will not be printed. They aren't funny... at all!

@pascalblance: Really nice look considering the original design, and I like the fact that they are massive and more distinctive.

@ecossefilmaker: they've messed with the mythology too much, the tone is all over the place & not enough actual turtles

@JonesyTheTwit: it looks awful.

@ELPaulo : hello Starburst, can you help, do you remember space biscuits around early 80's day glow colours, custard creams type, thanks

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS

CONSTANTINE



Now that's more like it! If this debut promo shot for NBC's upcoming *Constantine* pilot is anything to go by, then we can prepare to have 2005's woefully mishandled movie exorcised from our memories. Starring alongside Matt Ryan as the titular warlock is *True Blood*'s Lucy Griffiths as Liv Parsons, a young woman who teams up with John in his supernatural quest after he saves her from a powerful demon, and *LOST*'s Harold Perrineau as Manny the angel. Neil Marshall (*The Descent*) is currently shooting in New York, and should the DC/Vertigo comic book adaptation get picked up for series, we'll be seeing it on our screens this coming September.

AMERICAN HORROR STORY

Roll up, roll up! Showrunner Ryan Murphy has revealed the title and concept for the fourth season of his popular anthology series! Subtitled *Freak Show*, this year's tale will take place in the '50s, and revolve around one of the USA's few remaining sinister sideshows. Central to the story arc will be the "unusuals" who perform within the attraction, and Jessica Lange's German ex-pat who manages it. In typical AHS fashion, this fourth season will see the return of several familiar faces. As well as Lange, *Freak Show* will also see the returns of Evan Peters, Emma Roberts, Kathy Bates, Angela Bassett, Sarah Paulson, Jamie Brewer, Denis O'Hare and Frances Conroy. It's expected that Taissa Farmiga and Lily Rabe will similarly be confirmed to return shortly. New to the series this year is Michael Chiklis (*Fantastic Four*), who will be joining the show as the father of Peters' character. *American Horror Story: Freak Show* will premiere this October. | AP

WOLVERINE 3

20th Century Fox have set a release date of March 3rd, 2017 for their third Wolverine solo movie. *The Wolverine* director James Mangold has been long-confirmed to return, and now it's been revealed he'll be working from a script written by David James Kelly. This won't be Kelly's first involvement with the studio as he was previously attached to Fox's attempt to reboot *Daredevil* before the rights (thankfully) reverted back to Marvel Studios. As well as Mangold and Kelly on the film, there's also confirmation that Hugh Jackman will be returning as Wolverine. In recent interviews, the Australian actor has been non-committal about reprising Logan, openly admitting that it may soon be time for the character to be recast. With Wolverine playing a prominent role in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* and possibly appearing in 2016's *X-Men: Apocalypse*, it wouldn't surprise us if Jackman decides to call it a day after one final solo outing.

If Jackman does indeed appear in *Apocalypse*, once he wraps on the third solo Wolverine movie it will mark the ninth time that he's played the Canuckhead on the big screen, which is mighty impressive. Let's just hope that when he does go out, he goes out with a bang. *Old Man Logan*, anyone? That seems pretty impossible at this point, but we can dream, can't we? | AP

PIXELS

Adding a *Game of Thrones* actor to any screen project is a surefire way to get the attention of a large audience. Peter Dinklage, famous for vividly portraying Tyrion Lannister, is set to join the cast of *Pixels*, the upcoming 8-bit celebration inspired by filmmaker Patrick Jean's 2010 short (check it out on YouTube). Other new additions include Michelle Monaghan, recently seen in HBO's *True Detective*, and *Frozen*'s Josh Gad. Dinklage, playing a former *Donkey Kong* champion, joins the increasingly unfunny Adam Sandler for what looks set to be a retro romp, which will hopefully channel some of the heartfelt nostalgia seen in last year's *Wreck-It Ralph*. The plot is simple (albeit barmy), with New York City being attacked by characters from the golden age of arcade gaming, from *Space Invaders* to *Arkanoid*. The president (played by *King of Queen*'s Kevin James) asks his childhood video gaming buddies for help when the pixelated nasties invade. Director Chris Columbus (*Harry Potter* and *The Philosopher's Stone* + *Chamber of Secrets*) is behind the camera, with a script written by Timothy Dowling (of *Role Models*) and Sandler cohort Tim Herlihy (basically everything from Billy Madison onwards). Though apprehensive about certain aspects of the production, we have to admire *Pixels* for filling a void and championing the games of yesteryear. Maybe next-gen isn't always best. | DC

PROMETHEUS 2

Talk of a sequel to Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* has been ongoing since before the film was even released in 2012. Well, at last comes confirmation of a release date and a writer for *Prometheus 2*. Michael Green has been brought in to work on the script for the sequel, sprucing up the original draft that was done by Jack Paglen. Green is best known for penning the script for *Green Lantern*, but let's not hold that against him. He's also been involved with Scott on the long-mooted *Blade Runner* sequel. As for a release date, *Prometheus 2* has been pencilled in by 20th Century Fox for a March 4th, 2016 release, with production expected to start towards the end of the year. | AP

TERMINATOR: GENESIS

The Hunger Games? Dayo Okeniyi has landed a key role in the high-profile new trilogy, playing the character of Danny Dyson. If that name sounds familiar, that's because Dan is the son of Miles Dyson, who, when we met him in *Terminator 2*, sacrificed himself to destroy the company he created and prevent it from eventually leading to a robot revolution. Suffice to say, it prevented diddly and Skynet went online 5:18 pm Eastern Time on July 25th, 2004, screwing us all. Poor sod. As for this guy, smarts run in the family it seems, with Danny reportedly playing a "Steve Jobs type" egghed that "holds the key to technology development that makes Skynet possible." So... exactly like *Judgment Day* then? Consider us confused. Other new additions to the cast this month include the fabulous J.K. Simmons (Spider-Man's one-time J. Jonah Jameson), who will portray a determined detective on Sarah Connor's case; Byung-hun Lee (G.I. Joe's Storm Shadow), Sandrine Holt (*House of Cards*) and Michael Gladis (*Mad Men*), although who these latter three actors will be playing sadly remains under wraps at the time of going to print. What is concrete however, is that *Game of Thrones'* Alan Taylor will direct, with Emilia Clarke, Jason Clarke, Jai Courtney and some bloke called Arnold Schwarzenegger heading up the cast. The first of the new trilogy opens July 1st, 2015. Unless Skynet actually does rise up and enslave us all in the meantime. That would suck.

THE INCREDIBLES 2

Forget *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, forget *The Amazing Spider-Man 3*, forget *Batman vs. Superman vs. Wonder Woman vs. Green Lantern vs. the Kitchen Sink* or whatever the hell it's going to be called, the one superhero sequel we've really been waiting for is finally on its way, with reports that Pixar are officially developing *The Incredibles 2*! The news was announced by Disney CEO Bob Iger at March's shareholders meeting, along with the fact that original writer/director Brad Bird is writing the script. Although not yet confirmed it's likely the increasingly in demand Bird will also return to helm once he's finished work on sci-fi drama *Tomorrowland*, due May next year.

Not only is the 2004 original one of Pixar's most popular movies, but considering the continued obsession with superheroes at the Box Office, this sequel could be very timely indeed. Telling the story of a super-powered family - Mr Incredible, his wife Elastigirl and their children Violet, Dash and the rather brilliant baby Jack-Jack - it's a spot-on, affectionate send up of the genre, and a far better superhero movie than many of its live-action counterparts. No word yet on whether original leads Craig T. Nelson and Holly Hunter will be returning (though that's also highly likely), but the one and only Samuel L. Jackson has expressed an interest in reprising Frozone.

The Incredibles 2 is yet another follow-up for the increasingly sequel-happy Pixar. Besides the also in development *Finding Dory* (2016), three of the company's last four films have been sequels/prequels to their former hits. However, as those three featured the rather good *Monsters University* and the sublime *Toy Story 3*, we'll let them off. Yes, the other one was *Cars 2*, but you can't have everything. Oh, that reminds us, Iger also announced *Cars 3* is in development. But still, more *Incredibles*. | IR

THE LITTLE MERMAID

Even against her eclectic body of work, Sofia Coppola tackling a live-adaptation of the classic Hans Christian Andersen fairytale and Disney favourite came as a bit of surprise. But reports are that Coppola and Universal/Working Title have been in discussion, with the director set to inherit the project from *Atonement* director Joe Wright, who is instead busying himself with the Hugh Jackman starring *Pan*, an updated adaptation of J.M. Barrie's stories. The project has actually been in the air since 2011 when screenwriter Abi Morgan submitted a script, stressing the importance of the original, tragic ending where Ariel sacrifices herself for love. Caroline Tompson, the writer behind the darkly comic *Edward Scissorhands*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*, has been tasked with drafting the screenplay. | DC

PHANTASM V



Okay, so if you're a regular STARBURST reader you're probably wondering to yourself right now, "Hey, TTC, why was I not informed Don Coscarelli was working on a new *Phantasm* flick? You're always so shit-hot at keeping us informed of the latest and greatest in genre news, we're mildly disappointed at this omission. But considering your usual gold star standards we forgive you." (Or something to that effect.) Well, first, thank you for your kind words, we appreciate it, and secondly, we didn't report on it because that cheeky trickster Coscarelli somehow managed to keep production completely secret for two whole years until this month, when he sent *Phantasm* fans into a frenzy by dropping not just this poster, but a full trailer to boot. (If you're reading this issue on a tablet device, tap the poster to check out the promo. If you're reading this in print, tap all you want, all you're going to get is funny looks.) With principal photography already wrapped by new director David Hartman (Coscarelli is on writing & producing duties only this time out), Reggie Bannister will resume his battle with *The Tall Man* later this year.

SECTION 6

Joe Cornish has been busy helping Edgar Wright with the *Ant-Man* script, but he's now found a project to follow up his well-received 2011 feature debut *Attack the Block* - he's following in the footsteps of Sir George Mansfield Smith-Cummings, Bernard Lee, and Judi Dench as the director of Section 6, a.k.a. Military Intelligence, Section 6, a.k.a. M16. Except this time, it's a film, not an intelligence agency. **Section 6** will chart the early days of what would become James Bond's employer of choice. Cornish will have to search far and wide for a star to play Smith-Cummings - sadly, Benedict Cumberbatch, the only actor with a name posh enough to match, is too young to play the first director of the agency, who was in his fifties when it was set up during the First World War. But it shouldn't all be fusty old men sitting around boardrooms and deciding which countries need to be spied on - young upcoming star Jack O'Connell is already on the cast list, presumably as some sort of proto-007. | KM

JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS

"Jem is excitement! Ooooo, Jem! Jem is adventure! Oooooo, Jem is a... live-action reboot?" Wait, what? In a month that saw several leftfield '80s properties pegged for reimagining, animated series **Jem and the Holograms** takes the WTF crown. The eclectic trio of G.I. Joe: Retaliation director Jon M. Chu, horror producer Blum Blum and record mogul Scooter Braun have teamed to bring the cult show to life, and have invited the great unwashed to collaborate. It's likely you've missed your chance to send in your audition tape if you're learning of this for the first time [Nooooooooo! - Ed], as the production is moving at a weirdly fast pace (it's shooting by the time you're reading this). Truly outrageous!

For those unfamiliar with the series, it chronicled the adventures of orphaned record producer Jerrica Benton, who inherited a one-of-a-kind A.I. system codenamed Synergy. Naturally, Jerrica uses this tech to Hannah Montana herself an alter ego called Jem, and form a hit pop band. Somehow this concept was able to be stretched out for 65 episodes. Simpler times. Look for this baffling project to hit sometime in 2015.

As for those other '80s properties that we fleetingly mentioned earlier, get ready for new versions of **Pumpkinhead** and **Bananaman**. Okay, we confess - **Bananaman** is probably just a smidge more unusual a choice for revisiting in the 21st century than Jem, but we're really not sure what's going on with that one yet. Live-action or **Postman Pat**-style CG abomination, who knows, but head over to www.bananamanmovie.com to check out the ambiguous announcement #PEELTHEPOWER, and ponder just how publisher DC Thomson and Elstree Studios plan to set contemporary audiences on the fruit-based crimefighter. Again, simpler times.

IZOMBIE

If you've been chomping at the bit for more information about the CW's adaptation of DC Comics/Vertigo title **IZOMBIE** since it was announced in December, then you've come to the right place. Two more tasty morsels have been added to the casting menu in the forms of Rose McIver (*Once Upon a Time*) and newcomer Rahul Kohli (erm... *EastEnders*). McIver is set to play the lead character Liv (Gwen in the source), with Kohli portraying a nerding friend. The pair will be joining the previously announced Malcolm Goodwin (*Breakout Kings*) as Liv's homicide detective boss, Alexandra Krosney (*Transformers Prime*) as her best friend, 666 Park Ave's Robert Buckley (as her ex), and David Anders (*Alias*) as a wannabe drug lord in over his head.

Readers of Mike Allred's and Chris Roberson's comic book will no doubt be concerned that none of these characters are even featured in the original twenty eight issue series. What's more alarming is the fact that the basic premise has also been altered. In the comic book, Gwen is a gravedigger who needs to consume a brain every month. This tasty delicacy enables her to retain her mental faculties as well as appear human. She and her friends, Scott the weretierist and ghost Ellie, battle other supernatural entities whilst dealing with the complications of everyday life. The writers of the TV adaptation, Veronica Mars creator Rob Thomas and Diane Ruggiero (*Bates Motel*), have not only re-christened Gwen, but the character now works in a homicide morgue where she helps her boss solve crimes by digesting the brains of recent victims. It's too early to tell, but this sounds like it might be more police procedural than supernatural. CSI: Zombie might be a more apt title! [C]

TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL 2

That's right, the mistaken murderous hillbillies are making their way back to the big screen! **Tucker & Dale vs. Evil** may not have had a wide cinema release back in 2010, but it was a festival hit and has certainly made a mark on home video, amassing a loyal cult following, so news that a sequel is in development will make many squeal with glee. However, best cool your heels because the film is still a ways off yet. The announcement was made at the recent Horrorhound convention in Cincinnati, USA, when stars Tyler Labine and Alan Tudyk were guesting. Labine

and Tudyk stated they've received word from the original's producer that an outline now exists and that they're currently in search of a writer to take it to the next stage. Early days, sure, but Tudyk in particular considers this confirmation that the hapless redneck duo will be back onscreen one day soon. Only time will tell just what direction a sequel will take, and who'll be involved in the next series of grisly, accidental dispatches! [JB]

AND FINALLY...

Remember that heartwarming bit at the end of **The Goonies** when Chunk kindly tells Sloth that he's going to come live with him? Lovely wasn't it. Except Chunk never even asked his mum and dad! Surely they can't have been happy with that. Would you be? Anyway, we might finally get to find out exactly what did happen next, and how long that living arrangement lasted (if it was even honoured at all), because director Richard Donner has revealed that, 29 years later, work on a sequel has now finally begun.

Undeterred by the deafening fan-rage that's greeted every casting decision and mythology tweak thus far, 20th Century Fox, the studio behind the upcoming **Fantastic Four** reboot, has tossed us all the V's and locked July 14th, 2017 as the date its sequel will drop.

Captain America is set to do battle with Batman and Superman! Alas, this doesn't mean that Marvel and DC have put aside their differences to bring us a multi-universe crossover event, quite the contrary in fact. Marvel Studios have announced **Captain America 3** will go head-to-head with Warner Bros' **Batman/Superman** on May 6th, 2016.

Whether Cap emerges victor or not, expect his third solo adventure to be the last with Chris Evans as the star spangled man, as the actor admitted this month that he'll be retiring from life in front of the camera as soon as his Marvel contract runs its course with 2017's **Avengers 3**. With Sebastian Stan recently admitting he has a staggering 9-picture deal with the company, the clues are there that we might see another MCU character one day inherit the shield...

Manchester based Red Production Company (**Bedlam**) are rumoured to be in the early process of developing a TV show based on Robin Hardy's 1973 horror classic, **The Wicker Man**. "Oh God! Oh, Jesus Christ!" Chilli out, Howie. It can't be as bad as the Nicholas Cage version. Or Hardy's own pseudo-sequel **The Wicker Tree** for that matter...

Does everybody still love a Panther that is pink? MGM sum hope so, as they're preparing to relaunch the fifty-year old cartoon character with a new **Pink Panther** movie that will incorporate a blend of CG animation and live-action, ala those horrendous Smurf movies.

Talking of which, anybody care about **Smurfs 3** dumping the live-action aspect and rebooting? No? Moving on...

As reported briefly in **TTC 398**, Warner Brothers started developing **The LEGO Movie 2** for 2017 before the first even opened, but with its writer/directors Chris Miller and Phil Lord only taking producer duties this time out, the search was on for their replacement. Robot Chicken veteran Chris McKay has now secured the coveted position, which is much earned after serving as editor, animation supervisor and animation co-director on the last movie. Okay, altogether now. "Everything is awes-- [Stop. Right. There. Officially not funny any more. Just very, very annoying. - Ed]

Disney boss reveals that contrary to reports, a new **Pirates of the Caribbean** movie has yet to be greenlit. Best news we've heard all month.

TTC 400 written by KRIS HEYS, ANDREW POLLARD, DOMINIC CUTHBERT, IAIN ROBERTSON, CHRISTIAN JONES, KEIRON MOORE and JACK BOTTOMLEY

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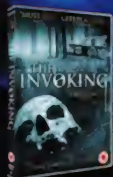
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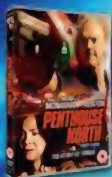
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STARBURST IN THE BEGINNING...

by Dez Skinn
& Jordan Royce



Early design ideas with slightly different logos for STARBURST Issue 1.

The mighty George Lucas and I, your every so humble creator of this very magazine, both owe the same person a humongous "thank you". Were this an Academy Awards Oscar-winning speech, this man would be right at the top of the "without whom" thanks list.

IN PRAISE OF PETER BEALE

But he's somebody you'll never even have heard of, one of those behind-the-scenes movers and shakers who makes magic happen. His name is Peter Beale and for most of the 1970s he was managing director of 20th Century Fox Productions in their Soho Square London offices (from 1973 to 1978, for nit-pickers out there).

As such, he reviewed lots of new projects during this key period, including a space opera homage to those Saturday morning cliffhanger *Flash Gordon/Buck Rogers* type serials that was initially entitled *The Adventures of Luke Spacewalker*.

It had already been turned down by all the other majors; Warners, MGM, Paramount, Columbia, United Artists and the like, despite being pitched by a man whose 1973 coming of age movie *American Graffiti* had been made for a mere \$775,000 and had brought in over \$200 million.

But this was 1976 and with the exception of a few scattered hits like 2001: A Space Odyssey and a bunch of Apes movies, SF wasn't a genre any film folk really wanted to invest in. Except Peter Beale, who recalls [see inset] "Alan Ladd Jr sent the script to me in London to see if it could be made and do an approximate budget". So, after Peter had worked his magic, along with a name change to the snappier *Star Wars*, George Lucas was given the go-ahead to make his film on the Pinewood lot, home of James Bond, Superman and a gaggle of Hammer horror.

Science fiction wasn't held in any higher regard in periodical publishing either. Attempts at SF magazines had generally been pretty short-lived affairs, whether Warren Publishing's *Spacemen* in the US (8 issues) and a special, 1961-1965) or the UK's *Science Fiction Monthly* (1974-1976, somewhat better at 28 issues) and *TV Sci-Fi* (1976, another 8 issue blip).

For myself, I'd always been as big a fan of science fiction as I had been of gothic horror, whether in books, TV or on the big screen. By 1976, I'd been fortunate enough to convert one of my passions into a job, producing the *House of Hammer* magazine. Even more fortunate, it had proven a success, both financially and critically. Now I was looking for a companion title.

So I was ecstatic when I saw the *Variety* June 1, 1977 cover headline: "Star Wars Best Start Since Jaws". Jaws had, of course, been the biggest-ever box office hit at that time, so now was my best chance! Thanks to getting the movie trade paper I knew that *Star Wars* wasn't due to open in the UK until Christmas, six months after its US premiere, so I'd plenty of time to get together what I anticipated would be a sure-fire hit!

Actual magazine titles are always a pain though. They really are crucial to make the whole shebang work properly. Not too long, or they won't leap out on the newsstand, and not too clever or your potential audience won't instantly know what they are. For the perennial popularity of *Star Trek* on the small screen and the forthcoming *Star Wars*, the first part of a title was obvious, but what to put with it? *Starfall* was a nice science fiction sort of word and was the popular choice for a few days, but I didn't really like the connotations of "fall". Then I hit on "burst". Positive and exciting, so STARBURST it was (and yes, Matilda, this was at a time when those made-to-make-your-mouth-water sweets were still named Opal Fruits).

Fiji-born Grahame Corbett, who I'd worked with at IPC Magazines when we were both new arrivals to London in 1970, came up with the wonderful title logo which I'm pleased is being used again. And while I opted for photos soon after the launch, with nothing readily available to sum up the entirety of Lucas's cinematic extravaganza my regular *House of Hammer* cover artist Brian Lewis produced a wrap-around *Star Wars* cover painting for the first issue, beautifully homaged for this very issue.

But there were two major hurdles to overcome before it could see print. The first, totally unexpected, came when 20th Century Fox put an embargo on releasing any visuals, stills or trannies as we used to



INTERVIEW: PETER BEALE

What was your role in Star Wars actually making it to the big screen?

I was Managing Director and Executive in Charge of Productions for 20th Century Fox UK, where I reported to FOX LA President, Alan Ladd Jr. It was Alan Ladd who was interested in making Star Wars and eventually approved it.

Famously Star Wars was turned down by several studios...

Yes, the main reason being the technical difficulty in making it. Also so few sci-fi films had been successful and, against the backdrop of the unpopular Vietnam War, having War in the title was seen as problematic.

However, Alan Ladd was a fan of George Lucas and liked the concept so he sent the script to me in London to see if it could be made and do an approximate budget. Along with the script they sent some initial artwork done by Ralph McQuarrie for George Lucas. Ralph was the person who, along with George Lucas, really set the visual parameters for the film.

Was it plain sailing after that point?

No not at all, there were a number of issues that needed to be solved; live action shooting with enormous sets, space ships etc, robots (R2-D2 and C-3PO especially), laser swords/light sabers, Plates for the "dog fights" with the actors in the star fighters and motion control.

Fortunately I did not have to solve the motion control. Motion control for miniatures had existed for a long time but required complex mechanical clock precision movements, and tracks with absolute temperature control to try and reproduce motion exactly. It worked, but not very well, was very slow and one could often see the matt lines. The problem was solved by US special effects wizard John Dykstra who used a lathe stepper-motor and created a whole new generation of special effects. All the effects were shot in a studio set up in the LA valley.

I worked for a month with art director Elliott Scott to work out in detail how to solve the problems making the live action and also to prepare the first outline budget. I then asked George Lucas and Gary Kurtz to London to work with me. It took about another month to get to the point where we agreed how the film should be made and to have an approximate budget.

I then informed Alan Ladd that it was possible and he green lighted the film. I asked and received a year's preparation, helped select all the key heads of departments, and supervised the production for Fox, co-signing all the cheques with Gary Kurtz.

When did you first realise that Star Wars could be a hit?

The first Star Wars movie occupied two years of my life, during which time we faced, and solved, numerous problems every day. Whilst filming we started to see children of the unit crew coming to the set and really liking it. This was very unusual but gave us the first inkling that we had

something special. Unfortunately the first edit did not work but when George's wife, Marsha, started working on it with George the film took on the life we now know.

After the filming was finished I also had the responsibility to develop the European merchandising. Star Wars was the first film outside of Disney to have it.

Do any moments stand out from that time?

The recording of the music by John Williams at Abbey Road. Studio musicians are normally very passive but they started to turn their heads to watch the film projected on the screen behind them during play back and broke into a spontaneous applause.

The most exciting time was the premiere/crew and cast screening at the Odeon Leicester Square where, as the opening credits happened, there was major applause, as there was at the end of the film.

What do you attribute to Star Wars' success?

Like all films, the result was the sum of many contributions, this one all focused on implementing the wonderful vision of George Lucas.

Of all the people asking to use the Star Wars imagery, why did you decide upon Dez and STARBURST?

Fox had a great publicity department and new merchandising team and under Alan Ladd's direction we wanted the film to be associated with quality. However it was embraced by young people who became a new generation of sci-fi lovers. Alan Ladd gave me a lot of freedom with regard to merchandising and special promotion. When I met and listened to Dez I felt he had a passion and vision for STARBURST that met our criteria. His continued success suggests that I made the right decision.



In the beginning there was Dez. A very '70s Dez.



The first cover without the image of Spock that had to be included at the last minute for legal reasons.

call them (don't ask!). They realised how valuable this new film was and refused to hand out any photos to cash-in new titles. When we asked, we were told we had to have an interview with Fox, to show them the dummy magazine for approval. An absolute first for an industry reliant on publicity to attract an audience, but a clue as to what a potential goldmine *Star Wars* was considered!

When the day for such came, a bunch of us were waiting to be heard, outside the MD's office. Clutching mock-up magazines with titles like *Starwarriors*, *Space Wars*, *Star Sci-Fi* and so on, each editor-in-waiting avoiding each other's nervous gaze. Like a headmaster ready to chastise or praise a gaggle of novices, Peter Beale was holding the interviews at Fox's plush Soho Square offices.

I could tell by their faces and demeanor as they departed crestfallen that all those before me had been turned down. Now I was being called into court to plead my case. Hardly had I sat down in the MD's sumptuous office than I found myself being grilled by a very scary legal sort, with Peter just looking on in silence. Both were men I'd never met before, having dealt on a day-to-day basis with the company's press office or on rare occasions publicity director.

Then Peter leaned across and touched the lawyer's shoulder, interrupting his interrogation and, in a scene reminiscent of Brando's *Godfather* said something along the lines of "Ease up. This guy's OK. He's covered a lot of our poorer efforts in another magazine he does and given them good write-ups."

He then turned to me and said, "Just do us all a favour and put something else on the cover as well as *Star Wars* or we'll have official licensee Marvel Comics breathing down our necks!"

Amazing. The man who had actually made the film become a reality had just made my little magazine happen too!

GETTING IT ON THE ROAD

At the time I was a happy loyal employee of the Warner Bros.-owned Williams Publishing – which used different publishing identities to separate its romance from comics from smut titles (*My Story*, *Tarzan* and *Parade* being examples of their smorgasbord offerings). But then, who wouldn't be happy to have an almost free reign over editing such titles as *MAD* and *Monster Mag* and a brief to add more? So when I read that jaw-dropping *Variety* headline about the looming *Star Wars* tsunami I burst into my boss's office and, with all the excitement you'd expect from a 25-year-old fantasy nut, announced our next title should be a science fiction film magazine.

"Groan. Not another film title," was the somewhat less-than-thrilled response.



The Three Musketeers. Tise Vahamigi (left), Dez Skinn (centre), and John Brosnan (right) - back in the heyday of *STARBURST*.



REGULAR COLUMNIST, DR SALLY GARY SAYS:

"*STARBURST* MAGAZINE IS THE ONLY WAY TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH WHAT'S NEW IN THE FANTASY GENRE."



FUTURE ISSUES OF *STARBURST* WILL INCLUDE FEATURES ON JOE DANTE'S *GREMLINS*, WALTER HILL'S *STREETS OF FIRE*, STEPHEN KING'S *CHILDREN OF THE CORN*, PLUS THE LAST *STARFIGHTER*, *CONAN 2* AND *STAR TREK 3*

PLACE A REGULAR ORDER WITH YOUR NEWSAGENT NOW!

At last it can be revealed. *STARBURST*'s Dr Sally Gary was in reality Editor Alan McKenzie's sister Donna.

Wha...?

He continued, "Tony (Crawley)'s doing adult films in Cinema X and Cinema Blue. You've done horror films in Monster Mag and now House of Hammer. You're spoofing new films in MAD. Don't you think we've more than enough film magazines?"

Oh. Didn't see that one coming!

But, undeterred, I asked naively and a tad outrageously, "OK, if you don't want us to do it here, can I do it by myself?"

More interested in where he'd drive his top end Porsche that evening than what I did in mine, he nonchalantly replied, "Provided you do it in your own time, I don't care."

So that was it, the biggest life change I was ever to go through, offered to me with all the gravitas of offering salt for your bag of chips.

Enlisting the design eye of my House of Hammer art editor and maybe just encroaching a little on office hours behind closed doors, I set to creating my first independent publishing venture.

PUTTING IT OUT THERE

Alongside Felix Dennis's Kung Fu Monthly, north London-based Moore-Harness became the distributor for STARBURST. A fiercely independent outfit, run by Brian Moore and my good Friday evening drinking chum Charlie Harness, they not only supplied federated trade wholesalers WH Smiths, Surridge Dawson, John Menzies and the rest (like distributors do!) but their own van wholesale people were great at jumping the system and placing sale-or-return copies directly into local newsagents (said vans resembling mobile libraries where the newsagent could step aboard for a sales patter-led quick pick and mix – an inspired and greatly-missed idea).

Moore-Harness also had a simple pre-launch marketing strategy: show newsagents the cover and ask how many copies they wanted. That was it. No expensive ad campaign, no sales force, just a mail shot!

So they circulated the trade with a simple black and white typed up sheet that had a tear-off coupon they could fill in saying how many they wanted along with a cover proof (because a few thousand sheets are best run on flatsheet proofing presses) and we all waited for the orders. When they came in they totalled a staggering 72,000 copies. Gulp.

Then came the second problem. I knew the guys at Liverpool Web Offset, we'd worked together before – but always in the past with me as an employee of an established company. Suddenly I was out on my own as an editor AND publisher, presenting them with a potential risk. Or as they put it about giving me credit, "We're not in for a share of any profit, so we don't want a share of any losses!" They wanted 50% of the print costs up front, so I suddenly had to come up with about £3,000 out of the blue (that's got to be around £18,000/\$25,000 today, thanks to inflation).

Maybe a tad outrageous, I actually asked the contributors to lend me money if they wanted to see their work in print! So between them Dave Gibbons, Alan McKenzie, John Brosnan and Tony Crawley helped me get the required deposit together. With so many pre-orders it goes without saying that it sold well, hence they got their money back in less than a month and – for those who wanted such – ongoing freelance work.

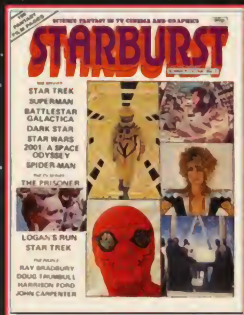
But I seriously owe them for their faith, whether it was in me or in Star Wars, because I'd never have got started without them. Cheers guys.

At the end of my editorial for the first issue, I wrote a risky and audacious comment, "Stay with us. This is only our first issue and we intend to be around for a l-o-n-g time!". Now here we are, celebrating the four hundredth anniversary.

Guess I got that one right!

Thanks Peter, for the green light. Thanks Dave, Alan, John and Tony for investing. And thanks Jordan for keeping the flame alive!

Dez Skinn
 Creator / Honorary Editor-in-Chief
 STARBURST MAGAZINE



Ultra rare cover of a special that reprinted issues 1 - 3 (known in the trade as a rebind) - this sadly never saw the light of day.



Welcome to the family. Dez takes over as head of Marvel Comics UK and STARBURST joins the stable of publications.



An unused Dez Skinn Dredd STARBURST logo.

PASSING THE TORCH



Dez Skinn and Jordan Royce prepare to meet the new writers at the STARBURST launch party, 2011.



"Don't screw this up!"



The new STARBURST writing team 2011.



Assistant Editor
KRIS HEYS

The reason it runs so smoothly.



STARBURST SHAUNA
The reason we still have a laugh on a bad day.

My name is Jordan Royce, my friends call me Mike. That's because it's actually my middle name - I'm not weird or anything. My tenure with the mag began with *The X-Files: I Want To Believe*. A good friend of mine called Helen invited me to see it, and wanted me to meet her other friend Kris. Over a few games of pool I met Kris Heys for the first time, and realised we had a number of things in common. We both worshipped our iPhones (stop sniggering, they were new then. No one had them. We were like warlocks!). We both thought that the latest Bond movie, *Quantum Of Solace* had been done by Edward Scissorhands, and bloody loved Joss Whedon. We were also about to share our first major movie disappointment as Billy Connolly stomped his big banana feet all over the *X-Files* franchise. Conversation later turned to STARBURST Magazine. I had connections with STARBURST going back many years through events and advertising the Fab Cafe movie theme bars in connection with them. The recession had just started to bite deep, and I heard STARBURST might have to cease printing. I did feel strongly that STARBURST could have a bright future and just didn't need to go the way of so many other recent additions to the pulp graveyard, and even when I was in a position to move forward with the magazine I knew the hardest challenge was about to come. STARBURST needed to get back in the public zeitgeist as soon as possible, but we couldn't do any of this without a team. Just like the Blues Brothers - I had to get the band back together!

The first call was a no-brainer. I had become good friends with Kris, and there was no one whose writing and professionalism I trusted more. Thankfully he came on board, and we started to look at how we could pull this off. The second thing to happen was just plain bizarre. I had prepared the new website, and was about to go live with an advert calling for readers to register their details, old writers to get in touch, and invited new blood to contact us as well. I had discussed how far away I felt the later STARBURST had gone from its original run under Dez Skinn, and that my preferred era was the Skinn early days. I felt it important for many reasons to invite him back. The site went live and I excitedly rang Kris to tell him we had our first reader register. He asked who. I felt silent. It was Dez Skinn. Out of the entire internet (and there was a massive subsequent response), the very first person on the site was Dez. I don't believe in karma, I am not religious, but that was just crazy.

I promptly got in touch and Dez immediately came on board. Next up to bat, an email arrived from Paul Mount. Back in the late eighties Paul Mount had taken over TV Zone, and was famous for his vitriolic towards *Robin O' Sherwood*. In a similar vein Sylvester McCoy was also a thorny subject when reviewing the declining years of *Doctor Who*. Paul was back. Other columnists returned and we took on a team of new writers who would later define the latest incarnation of STARBURST in their own unique ways. It certainly isn't STARBURST without Horror Obscura, Watching Doctor Who, and a raft of other new favourites. Whilst I would love to tell a tale with a Rocky soundtrack playing, a tale of struggle and eventual triumph, STARBURST actually just took off. Within 8 months we had over 150,000 people following us on Twitter, me and Kris were hosting the STARBURST Radio Show on Manchester Radio, and were about to go back into print.

Now let me tell you about Dez Skinn. The minute we were prepping for print the legend of Dez leapt into action. When he is on form he is a force of nature. The print deadline day for issue 374 was fraught with problems but Dez sorted all of the print issues (I actually do believe his "print is in my blood" soundbyte that he trots out when you doubt his demise). My favourite Dez putdown has to be in response to the Avengers cover we ran. "The Hulk is the wrong shade of green," he said. "Are you sure?", I countered. This insolence was swiftly dispatched with a cursory, "I edited Marvel UK's Hulk Comic". Bloody hell. It's not even a fair fight. He helped us out, and we were back. Now we only had to meet the final member of our motley gang.

A few months later we were at an art gallery on a night out with a Borg (don't ask!), and we met the final member of the team - STARBURST Shauna (or Shauna Askew as she is known professionally). Dressed as a vulcan, and ready to mess up her life by coming on board. She might hate Star Wars but the force is strong in this one.

Where we go from here is anyone's guess. All I know is that every month I get to work with my mates Kris and Shauna to put out the best mag we can, and make certain that we are in good shape for another 400 issues. It's been one hell of a ride, and it ain't over yet...

Jordan Royce
Editor

STARBURST MAGAZINE

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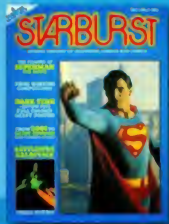
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Now we all know the origin story, it's time to take a journey with us. A journey that takes us through 37 years of weird and wonderful entertainment. A journey some of you shared with us, and others might be curious about. 400 issues is a long time, but please join us as we take a look at our story so far...

Jordan M. Royce
EDITOR

OUR JOURNEY THROUGH GENRE

400 Issues of STARBURST

The 1970s by ROBIN PIERCE



The '70s are often maligned as the decade that style forgot, but looking back from a film and TV perspective, the warm glow of nostalgia is undeniable. The decade that gave us Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker as The Doctor also gave us Lee Majors as the world's first bionic man (at a bargain price of six million dollars), a bionic woman, a boy AND, eventually, a dog. We had an *Invisible Man*, a *Gemini Man* whose digital watch stabilised his invisibility. Apes ruled the screen both in cinemas and on TV. Logan would similarly run from big screen to small, we ate *Soylent Green*, not knowing what the prime ingredient was, but in the main, *Doctor Who*, *Blake's 7* and *Space 1999* notwithstanding, most screen sci-fi was earthbound. (And even the Doctor was exiled on Earth for a couple of years!)

The first sign most of us who were around at the time saw that there was a major paradigm shift on its way was on the cover of our late sister magazine and predecessor *House of Hammer*, when

STARBURST



publisher Dez Skinn abandoned the customary painted cover in issue 16 and placed instead a photo of what appeared to be a cowboy aiming a ray gun and an ape brandishing a crossbow.

Star Wars was on its way, having been released in the United States in May 1977, and the publicity was gathering momentum in the United Kingdom for a Christmas release with, as ever, the team that would eventually bring you *STARBURST* on the case with a scoop!

That first issue of *STARBURST*, priced at a modest fifty pence, covered *Star Wars* in depth, with an article called *Star Wars: Buccaneers in Space* and a look at *The Making of Star Wars* by one of the true legends of entertainment journalism, the late John Brosnan.

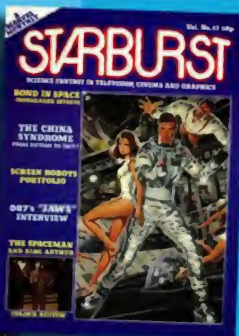
Star Wars blasted open the floodgates to a tsunami of sci-fi, literally changing the face of films, and ushering a new era where the fringe would become mainstream and *STARBURST* has been there to cover it all. Looking back at the late '70s, you really can't be blamed for thinking that our taste in films and the anticipated releases really haven't changed much at all. For example, in 1978, we were looking forward to the theatrical release of a *Spider-Man* film!

Nicholas Hammond had graduated from his role as one of the Von Trapp children in *The Sound of Music* to become Peter Parker/Spider-Man in the pilot film to a short-lived TV series based on the Marvel character and, as often happened back then, the pilot movie was released theatrically outside the USA, to be followed by two sequels consisting of TV episodes edited together in *Spider-Man Strikes Back* and *Spider-Man and the Dragon's Challenge*.

It wasn't long after *Star Wars* that the next sci-fi blockbuster was upon us in 1978 as Steven Spielberg consolidated his place in genre film history with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, detailing the



STARBURST



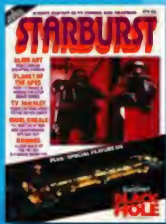
effects of UFO sightings on ordinary, urban people living their ordinary day to day lives. STARBURST had a scoop in its second issue as legendary author Ray Bradbury penned his thoughts on the film in a guest column.

If spacebound adventures were dominating cinema screens in those far off pre-multiplex days, TV was never going to be too far behind in catching on to the trend. *Battlestar Galactica* rumbled on to the small screen in the USA – the most expensive TV series ever made up to that point. It literally rumbled on the big screen as the first three episodes were edited into a single film, with the added bonus of sensurround – the novelty of the day used in both *Earthquake* (1974) and *Rollercoaster* (1977) designed to give a realistic rumbling vibration during key scenes. Basically, it amounted to little more than heightened bass levels delivered through additional speakers.

As we patiently awaited the network arrival of *Galactica*, the superheroes were battling on TV with *The Incredible Hulk* helping the hopeless while the renamed David Banner (don't ask) was on the run, thought dead, whilst his rage driven alter ego was accused of a murder he didn't commit. DC Comics were represented by *Wonder Woman* as former Miss USA Lynda Carter was immortalised as the star spangled Amazonian princess for three seasons.

As 1978 drew to a close, the most anticipated movie of the year was released. *Superman – The Movie* brought the last son of Krypton to life for the first time since the George Reeves TV series of the fifties in a truly epic film that charted the character's origin and established Krypton for the first time as an ice planet – a notion that would persist until *Man of Steel* (2013). Christopher Reeve was a crowd pleaser as the naïve and innocent Man of Steel in Richard Donner's masterpiece, which was filmed back to back with its sequel, though much of the second film would

STARBURST



be reshot prior to release. The budget for the seven month shoot was in excess of an eye watering \$65,000,000. How times have changed. The film, however successful, didn't please everybody. STARBURST reviewer John Brosnan noted "Well, I did and I didn't. Believe a man can fly, that is, as the *Superman* publicity machine assured me I would."

Even in 1979 we were looking forward to seeing an adaptation of Tolkien's work to hit the cinemas. And hit it did, in the form of Ralph Bakshi's animated *Lord of the Rings*, which was a hit and miss affair, but largely, overall – a miss. Let's face it, cramming the story into a 135-minute running time was never going to work. Unsurprisingly, the mooted sequel never saw the light of day and the project ended at the battle of Helm's Deep.

For years, much to the frustration of John Brosnan, the Bond films had been getting further and further mired in fantasy – each film becoming more far fetched than the last. This trend peaked in *Moonraker*, Roger Moore's fourth outing in the role which boasted Bond in space as 007 investigated the theft of some space shuttles in a script cannily timed to coincide with NASA's launch of the revolutionary re-useable space vehicle. Unfortunately, NASA suffered a series of technical hitches and delays, leaving Bond ahead of them, in the unlikely position of being fully familiar with the laser armaments of the shuttle, destroying a space station and saving the Earth in the most cringingly comic script of the franchise... "He's attempting re-entry"!!

While Tom Baker was the most popular and longest running Doctor on the BBC's ongoing sci-fi series, ITV retaliated on Saturday nights by screening Universal's reworking of the original space hero (who even outdated *Flash Gordon* in the newspaper comic strips), *Buck Rogers*.

Gil Gerard was accidentally frozen in suspended animation on a space mission and discovered in the far flung future of the 25th century. Sadly, the dramatically tragic "man out of time" aspect of the story, morbid as it was, was quickly ditched and Rogers became a perky disco dancing adventurer and the 25th century's top fighter pilot, accompanied by his little robot sidekick Twiki. The original premise lasted a year before being reworked to a space exploration theme in its second and final season.

Other notable TV shows were ITV's four part Wednesday night adaptation of Nigel Kneale's fourth Quatermass serial with John Mills in the title role, battling aliens who had seeded us humans here on Earth to farm us for food and now wanted to harvest their crop. As if that wasn't enough, in an earlier timeslot, ex *New Avengers* girl Joanna Lumley joined forces with ex *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* David McCallum as a couple of elemental detectives in *Sapphire and Steel* – one of the most quirkily haunting and confusing half hour series of the decade.

Two of 1979's major releases owed much to B-movie sensibilities of the fifties, as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was remade into a creepily effective thriller, heightening the paranoia of its source material as Donald Sutherland's Miles Bennell discovers that the people around him aren't quite what they seem, in a film that our reviewer John Baxter correctly concluded in issue 9 was bound to become a classic in its own right.

Alien, on the other hand, may not have been a straight remake of it: *The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) but it was close enough for the producers of the earlier film to consider a lawsuit for plagiarism, but withdrew. The crew of the *Nostromo* fought valiantly for their lives against an alien who had come on board using John Hurt's Kane as a

human incubator. The eventual reveal of the Alien, who is only glimpsed quickly throughout the film until the final scenes, is a textbook example of unnerving tension.

A notable release of the summer was Disney's *The Black Hole*, which featured on the cover of issue 16 and proclaimed that nothing could escape a black hole – not even light. (Obviously the effects crew weren't aware of the publicity blurb, nor science as the black hole in question is a swirling mass of blue against the starscape.) Maximilian Schell did his very best Captain Nemo impersonation as Dr Hans Reinhardt, a mad scientist crazy enough to want to explore the black hole, taking our hapless heroes with him, as well as their irritatingly cute robot V.I.N.C.E.N.T. voiced by Roddy McDowall. Despite its spectacular set pieces, the film was bogged down with Disney's trademark sentimentality and religious allegory.

If STARBURST had started its '70s run with *Star Wars*, then we would see the decade out with the return of the other cover feature from our first issue as we celebrated the cinematic debut of probably the most influential science fiction series of all time. The crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise had regrouped on board a refitted starship and would once again boldly head out to confront a menace threatening Earth.

Sadly, the film itself became more immersed in Doug Trumbull's light show effects than developing a storyline and thus *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* became scorned as 'Star Trek: The Motionless Picture' and the plot was quickly identified by sharp eyed Trekkies as a lazy reworking of two second series episodes, *The Changeling* and *The Doomsday Machine*. Style couldn't beat substance – fans would have to wait a while until the sequel for that...

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Steven Spielberg and George Lucas were responsible, in the '70s, for a movie-house monster which looks set to blight (or depending on your critical perception, improve) the cinema-going experience forever. Released in the US in June 1975, Spielberg's killer shark shocker *Jaws*, based on Peter Benchley's best-selling novel, became the early benchmark for what would become known as the 'summer blockbuster' movie. Understandably captivated by the movie's \$470 million Box Office haul and the riches raked in by Lucas's 1977 sci-fi extravaganza *Star Wars* (you may have heard it spoken of) the studios were quick to realise that rich pickings were available should the right high-concept movie be released during the prime summer cinema-going period. So it was inevitable that, given the success of two of the biggest-grossing hits in cinema history, the '80s would see the studios moving into the area of the 'event' or 'tentpole' movie, crowd-pleasing but not necessarily,

initially at least, star-driven vehicles with increasingly outlandish plots and evermore extravagant special effects.

Hand-in-hand with this new drive towards creating must-see centrepiece films came the rise of the 'franchise' movie: films which were not only hits in their own right, but which had the capacity to generate a string of sequels, bringing audiences back to see the further exploits of characters whose adventures they'd already enjoyed. So the '80s is a curious decade in that it created a number of landmark science-fiction/fantasy film series, movies which are the cornerstones of many fans' devotion to the genre but many of which led to sequels which inevitably weren't as good but also generally weren't as successful. And as the years and decades have rolled by, new generations of cinema-goers are being seduced by remakes and reboots of titles and series which, to many cinema-goers, are not only beloved favourite movies but are still effectively firmly rooted in our recent modern movie culture.

Gordon, based on Alex Raymond's 1930's comic strip, failed to find an appreciative contemporary audience. Perhaps it was the dodgy special effects, perhaps it was the charisma-vacuum created by its bland leading man, former nude centrefold Sam Jones; but certainly only actor Brian Blessed has any real cause to celebrate *Flash Gordon* as it provided him with a catchphrase he continues to bellow at any and every opportunity to this day. The *Star Wars* juggernaut rolled on too, with Irwin Kirschner's much-awaited sequel *The Empire Strikes Back* appearing in May 1980. The first (and anticipated, at the time, as the only) *Star Wars* trilogy came to an end in 1983 with *Return of the Jedi* but Hollywood was to realise that no successful film series can really be allowed to lay down and die when it's told its story and there's always a way to squeeze a few more cash dollars from an often-gullible public.

Star Trek is one film franchise that probably wouldn't have come into existence without the success of *Star Wars*. The TV series had been cancelled back in 1969 but in the post-*Star Wars* space opera scramble it was surely a no-brainer for Paramount to finally fast-track a feature film based on the popular cult series they'd abandoned a decade earlier. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* had been a substantial hit in 1979 and a series of sequels, featuring the original (ageing) cast from the old TV series, was studied throughout the '80s with the 'old guard' finally giving way to the cast of the *Next Generation* series (which started its seven-year TV mission in 1987) in 1991's *Generations*.

Things weren't so rosy for the Last Son of Krypton during the '80s. *Superman II*, released in 1980, continued the sterling work of its 1978 predecessor *Superman - The Movie*. Despite behind-the-scenes shenanigans which saw its original director Richard Donner replaced by Richard Lester, *Superman II* was a powerful and imposing picture which built upon the impressive groundwork of the first. But 1983 saw

But let's not race for the exit when the delights of the main feature still await. As the new decade emerged blinking from the shadow of the '70s, a big, brash space opera adventure appeared which must surely have been expected to launch a new science-fiction film series in the wake of the success of *Star Wars*. But although it's gone on to achieve camp cult status, Mike Hodge's arch update of *Flash*

The by PAUL MOUNT 1980s



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the arrival of *Superman III* with its much more frivolous and overly comedic tone. *Superman* star Christopher Reeve battled to restore the Man of Steel's reputation in a fourth movie but 1986's *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, with its preachy storyline and ropey special effects (thanks to a massive budget cut) saw *Superman* crashing to Earth at last. Combined with the dreadful performance of the atrocious *Supergirl* in 1984, it was clear that the cinema-going public had had enough of believing a man can fly and it would be nearly twenty years before the character would find himself up, up and away again in a movie theatre.

Meanwhile the James Bond franchise, which had powered throughout the '60s and '70s generally blithely oblivious to other movie fads and trends (apart, perhaps, from a nod to the kung fu craze in 1975's *Man With the Golden Gun* and 1979's space-age *Moonraker*; a last-minute - and some might say cynical - replacement for the planned *For Your Eyes Only* in response to the unexpected and game-changing success of *Star Wars*). Bond seemed indestructible even in the '80s, with five new entries into the series. Roger Moore was still brandishing the vodka martinis and raising his eyebrow in *For Your Eyes Only* (which finally surfaced in 1981), *Octopussy* (1983) and *A View To A Kill* (1985), but by 1987, with Moore now a stately sixty year-old, it was time for a change, and Timothy Dalton was cast to bring a grittier edge to Bond's exploits. But the world wasn't yet ready for a more realistic 007 and 1987's *The Living Daylights* and 1989's *License To Kill*, whilst well-regarded by fans, weren't well-received at the Box Office, and when Bond returned in 1995 after a legal dispute which kept him off the screen for five years, the character had turned into the much more multiplex-friendly Pierce Brosnan.

1985 saw the arrival of another of the decade's great film series as Marty McFly (Michael J Fox) found himself travelling...



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well, 'back to the future' for the first time in a time-travelling DeLorean souped-up by the eccentric Dr Emmett Brown (Christopher Lloyd). Directed and co-written by the prolific Robert Zemeckis, *Back to the Future* was a good-natured High School time-travel romp and Fox became so 'hot' in its fiery wake that it was four years before the first of the series' two back-to-back sequels could be released. Elsewhere, George Miller's post-apocalyptic anti-hero *Mad Max* followed his 1979 debut (released in the States in 1980) with 1981's *Mad Max II* and 1985's *Beyond Thunderdome* in a series which, for better or worse, made an international superstar of Mel Gibson. 1987 saw the arrival of Paul Verhoeven's brutal and uncompromising *RoboCop*, 1979's *Alien* spawned James Cameron's 1986 outer space bloodbath *Aliens* and in 1984 Ivan Reitman unleashed *Ghostbusters* on an unsuspecting world. Its irresistible combination of freestyle comedy, slapstick and light paranormal adventuring launched a multimedia phenomenon which ran to action figures, comic strips, TV cartoons and the less well-received *Ghostbusters II* in 1989.

The decade's other great action/fantasy franchise made its inaugural appearance in 1981, as Steven Spielberg unveiled the iconic whip-wieldin', fedora-sportin' Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Last Ark*. Indy, a timely tribute to the two-fisted action heroes of 1930's Saturday morning cinema serials, arrived as a welcome respite from the tiresome tide of *Star Wars* rip-offs which had flooded cinema screens since 1977, and he'd return to entrance audiences in two sequels that same decade.

The '80s were to be the most fertile years for two of Hollywood's more interesting directors. John Carpenter enjoyed a string of acclaimed genre hits from *The Fog* in 1980, *Escape from New York* in 1981, *The Thing* in 1982, 1983's Stephen King adaptation *Christine*, the sickly *Starman*

in 1984 and 1986's cult favourite *Big Trouble in Little China*. But his failure to secure a huge box office success made it difficult for Carpenter to finance future projects and he retreated into making lower budget features, resulting in a string of increasingly less interesting movies. Canadian director David Cronenberg is often referred to as the architect of what's become known as 'body horror', psychological films obsessed with physical transmutation, infection and decay. The '80s saw him operating at his peak with *Scanners* (exploding heads) in 1981, *The Dead Zone* (coma patient awakes with new psychic powers) in 1983, *The Fly* (boffin Jeff Goldblum transforms into a fly... with predictably icky consequences) in 1986 and 1988's *Dead Ringers* (troubled psychopathic twins). Later in his career Cronenberg would become arguably more mainstream but his obsessions reached their zenith in the 1990s with *Naked Lunch* and *Crash*.

But whilst the '80s are especially notable for their movie franchises, the studios becoming increasingly risk-averse by sticking to the tried-and-tested, the decade is, of course, peppered with genre classics which were one-offs. 1982's *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott's dystopian noir sci-fi thriller, was much misunderstood on release but is now an acknowledged classic of the genre. The same year saw the release of Spielberg's *E.T.* - *The Extra-Terrestrial*, a feelgood fantasy which overhauled *Star Wars* to become the biggest box office smash of all time, taking nearly \$800 million. Terry Gilliam established himself as an off-the-wall maverick with his two most-beloved movies - 1981's *Time Bandits* and 1985's *Brazil*. Alex Cox created the cult classic *Repo Man* in 1984, Tim Burton delivered *Beetlejuice* in 1988 and James Cameron unveiled a franchise-to-be in 1984 with the spectacularly violent *The Terminator*, before pioneering revolutionary CGI special effects techniques in *The Abyss* in 1989.

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And not forgetting... ah, but that's the thing. All we've been able to do here is scratch the surface of the movies of the '80s - no time for *Highlander* (there can be only one - so why were there all the others?), *Saturn 5*, Ray Harryhausen's last stand in *Clash of the Titans*, *Enemy Mine*, *Alien Nation*, *Legend*, *Flight of the Navigator*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit...*, the list goes on and on and there are as many overlooked gems (post-apoc thrillers such as *The Quiet Earth* and *Miracle Mile*) as there are appalling sword-n-sorcery stinkies like *Beastmaster*, *Red Sonja* or *Star Wars* rip-offs like *Space Raiders* and *Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone*. Ultimately it's a testament to just how good genre movies were in the '80s that most of them are not only firm favourites twenty-five years or more later but that many of them are now being rebooted, reimagined or just plain reinvigorated. J.J. Abrams has reinvented *Star Trek* and is in the process of doing the same for *Star Wars*, *RoboCop* has been back in service again in 2014, there are rumours of a West End musical based on *Back to the Future*, the *Man of Steel* is back, *Ghostbusters III* is apparently finally 'go' and there's a new *Mad Max* ready to roll out next year in *Fury Road*.

But perhaps, just perhaps, the most influential movie of the '80s arrived right at the tail end of the decade. Tim Burton cast Michael Keaton in his new, dark, Gothic take on *Batman* and suddenly superheroes were back in fashion. Slowly but surely Hollywood turned its greedy eye on the four-colour world of the comic book and... well, the rest is recent cinema history...

In regards to TV, it's always harder to identify any real trends in 'genre' because relatively few fantasy shows cross over into the mainstream to make enough of an impact to influence the 'bigger TV picture'. Throughout the '60s and '70s TV networks in both the UK and the US

were happy to commission genre shows which, more often than not, were just regarded as part of the TV landscape. But the rise of 'geek culture', organised sci-fi fandom and the higher profile (and more intense audiences) of those shows which became the big hitters, led to a change in the way genre shows were perceived. Certainly in the wake of *Star Wars*, TV executives became uncomfortably aware that their low-budget efforts couldn't match their audience's expectations after they'd experienced the miracles worked by the likes of Lucas and Spielberg on the big screen. Which doesn't necessarily mean that TV didn't put up a fight... In the early '80s alone, the BBC mounted what is still the most faithful version of John Wyndham's classic *Day of the Triffids* with its six-episode 1981 series, creepy four-part thriller *The Nightmare Man*, two *Play For Today*: *Dominick Hyde* time-travel stories and, in 1981, a hugely-ambitious six-part adaptation of Douglas Adam's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It was this more extreme form of fantasy TV, requiring extensive special effects, which suffered the most in the '80s. *Blake's 7* fizzled out in 1981 with its misjudged fourth season, and even perennial favourite *Doctor Who* began to struggle.

Doctor Who had, in 1976, come under considerable criticism for its 'violent and horrific' content (mainly from Mary Whitehouse and her self-appointed National Viewers and Listeners Association) and the show had already been creatively castrated by the time *Star Wars* came along to deliver a potentially-fatal body blow. When Tom Baker vacated the TARDIS in 1981 after an epic seven-year tenure, the show rallied briefly with new incumbent Peter Davison in the title role but ratings began to slump towards the middle of the decade and by 1989 the show's profile was so low - thanks to a continued run of poor stories and a handful of bad casting decisions - that most TV viewers weren't even aware it was still being made. In 1984 the BBC

touted *The Tripods*, based on John Christopher's thin trilogy of children's science-fiction stories chronicling life after an invasion by 'Wellesian' three-legged fighting machines, as a potential replacement for the ailing *Doctor Who*. But *The Tripods* never caught on; Christopher's books were eventful enough but there just wasn't enough material for three series of thirteen episodes and the show was cancelled (on an epic cliffhanger) at the end of the second series.

In 1987, BBC2 launched Chris Boucher's *Star Cops*, clearly having forgotten that BBC1 had tried a similar series in 1973 (*Moonbase Three*) which sank without trace. A similar fate awaited *Star Cops*, which vanished after one eight-episode series. In 1984 the BBC screened *Threads*, a terrifyingly-realistic portrayal of a nuclear attack on the UK and its potential consequences and such was its bleakness it gave viewers sleepless nights for weeks and remains an uncomfortable viewing experience to this day. 1985 saw the much-repeated nuclear age thriller *Edge of Darkness* and the first series of *Red Dwarf* arrived on BBC2 with little fanfare in 1988. The show, at one time easily BBC2's highest-rated series, eventually fell out of favour at the Corporation but was resurrected on lads' channel Dave for a successful six episode run in 2012 which saw a return to basics, concentrating on character comedy rather than glibly special effects and over-complicated joke-free storylines.

Even US TV was short on sci-fi in the '80s, but a number of big budget, high profile shows made their way over to the UK, though they made little real impact on the schedules or viewers. Short-lived series such as *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Kolchak: the Night Stalker*, the reboot of *The Twilight Zone* and sci-fi sitcom *ALF* all turned up on ITV, whereas the original *V* mini-series enjoyed a prime time slot - and delivered spectacular ratings - when it debuted in the summer of 1984.

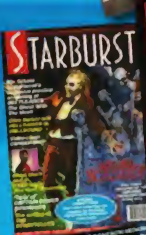
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Much home-grown fare tended to be aimed at children – Chocky, *Into the Labyrinth*, *Captain Zep* – *Space Detective*, Gerry Anderson's under-appreciated *Terrahawks*, *Knights of God*. Incredibly, ITV aired the brain-frying *Sapphire and Steel*, which finally ended in 1982, in the 7 pm weeknight slot currently (and apparently eternally) occupied by rural soap opera *Emmerdale*. Meanwhile Richard (Catweazle) Carpenter gave the legend of Robin Hood a supernatural spin in *Robin of Sherwood* which ran for three Saturday night series on ITV but came a cropper when its original star Michael Praed dropped out after two years and the role was recast with Jason Connery; the series ended in 1986 and remains most notable for bringing Ray Winstone into the wider public consciousness.

But for cult TV fans, though, perhaps the most significant new series of the '80s was *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The show ushered in not only a new era for the *Star Trek* franchise itself (going on to spawn three other *Star Trek*-based shows) but a new era of mature, sophisticated and thought-provoking genre television which strived to be more than just 'adventure of the week' fodder. The series debuted in 1987 in the States but, astonishingly for those of us living at a time when new first-run episodes of hot American shows are screened in the UK within hours of their US broadcast, it finally materialised on UK television three years later!

Nearly twenty-five years on and genre TV is probably healthier than it's ever been and the proliferation of network TV channels and cable stations has created a voracious demand for new high-concept dramas capable of drawing in audiences with labyrinthine plots, convoluted relationships and ever-elaborate story arcs. It's all a far cry from the simpler, brighter days of the '80s when pickings for even the most devoted fan of fantasy TV were considerably slimmer...





The 1990s was a strange era for the world of sci-fi, horror and fantasy. On the back of countless slashers and video nasties, so much of the '90s movie landscape was filled with churned-out sequels and the continued moving away from practical SFX work in favour of new, shiny, computer-generated effects. That's not to say that there weren't some truly stunning movie moments and breakthroughs in films, and that's what we'll get to here. As for the world of TV, without the big budgets afforded to present day series, we saw shows of the time making the most of what they had at their disposal, strong practical SFX work and intricate storytelling.

Starting with the movie world, the early '90s brought a mixed bag that featured the likes of *Back to the Future Part III*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Gremlins 2: The New Batch*, *Predator 2*, two *RoboCop* movies, two *Critters* movies, *Scanners II*, *Pet Sematary II*, *Basket Case 2* and 3, *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, two *Child's Play* efforts, *Psycho IV*, *Alien 3*, *The Exorcist III*, *Prom Night III*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, several more *Star Trek* journeys and the return of *Evil Dead's* Ash in *Army of Darkness*. As a result, it can easily be claimed that the turn of the decade was heavily-reliant on draining properties that had already achieved some modicum of success. Whilst some were throwaway sequels, offerings like *Terminator 2* were game changers.

Before T2's T-1000 blew our minds in 1991, jaws had hit the floor with Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall*. Both Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicles, the pair garnered ridiculous amounts of awards and praise for the revolutionary effects work on show. For those who weren't around at the time, it's hard to explain just how ground breaking those movies were, and Robert Patrick's sleek, smooth, relentless T-1000 is still a joy to watch. For better or for worse, it was becoming apparent that practical effects were going to become a thing of the past.

Elsewhere, '91's *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country* brought fans the last big screen outing for the show's original cast. By this point, though, fans had already been introduced to *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on the small screen. Launching in 1987, and headed up by Patrick Stewart's Jean-Luc Picard, *The Next Generation* crew would take over *Star Trek's* feature film series with '94's *Star Trek Generations*, which featured the combined presence of Picard and William Shatner's James T. Kirk.

Over in TV land, the 1990s saw failed attempts at relaunching familiar brands with the likes of *Frankenstein: The College Years*, *Sherlock Holmes Returns* and *Knight Rider 2000*. Not to worry, for something special was on the horizon, *Batman: The Animated Series*.

First airing in 1992 as a direct result of the success that Tim Burton's *Batman* and *Batman Returns* had garnered, B:TAS can be cited as the first time that the Dark Knight had been taken seriously on screen. Forget Nolan's trilogy, Paul Dini and Bruce Timm created a show that gave the quintessential definition of the character; a Batman that was brought to life by the dulcet tones of the fantastic

Kevin Conroy. As well as several animated movies, including the iconic *Mask of the Phantasm*, the show also led to *Superman: The Animated Series*.

Away from the DC world, FOX developed *Spider-Man: The Animated Series* and *X-Men*. Both running for multiple seasons, these shows were novel for featuring drawn-out story arcs that would run for an entire season at a time. The shows proved hugely successful and popular with fans, introducing a whole generation to some supporting characters that were not always well known.

For younger fans who craved the creepy there was 1991's *Eerie Indiana* and 1995's *Goosebumps*. Both shows had a warm charm to them, although a sinister underbelly was often lurking, particularly in the adaptations of R.L. Stine's classic *Goosebumps* tales. And then there was *Power Rangers*, a fantastically crazy show that causes shudders on repeat viewings. Similarly, the animated *Toxic Crusaders* show saw the bastardisation of Troma's poster boy, Toxic. Making the very adult *Toxic Avenger* the focus of a kid-centric, environmentally friendly cartoon brought some truly awful results.

The 1990s by ANDREW POLLARD



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For fans of exciting sci-fi, *Star Trek* added the strategic, serious *Deep Space Nine* in 1993, and fan-favourite *Voyager* in 1995. DS9 gave fans an African American lead in Avery Brooks' Benjamin Sisko, whilst *Voyager* had a female lead in Kate Mulgrew's Kathryn Janeway. A woman?! Great Scott! Elsewhere the notion of space, aliens and sci-fi was further explored with the likes of *Alien Nation*, *Babylon 5* and *Farscape*, not to mention movie tie-ins like 1997's *Stargate SG-1* and, er, the 1990 animated *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventures*.

Away from *Star Trek*'s dominance, there was *The X-Files*. Created by Chris Carter in 1993, the series introduced us to Mulder and Scully (yes, the very same ones that Catatonia sung about). Featuring the sizzling will they/won't they chemistry of David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, the show incorporated mysteries of the supernatural, the otherworldly and the extra-terrestrial. A perfect mix of sci-fi, fantasy and horror, the series was a huge success, spawning two so-so movies. Carter would also find time to create the Lance Henriksen-starring *Millennium*, which ran for three seasons before being cancelled in 1999.

On the lighter side of things, viewers were given the likes of the *Weird Science* TV show, the humorous *Third Rock from the Sun* (complete with a ponytail-sporting, teenage Joseph Gordon-Levitt), and the camp *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. Whilst *Hercules* was easily forgettable, it did lead to a little spin-off known as *Xena: Warrior Princess*; a show that proved a big success. Even to this day, fans still clamour for Lucy Lawless to play *Wonder Woman* on the big screen. Not quite as successful was the badly-handled *RoboCop: The Series* in 1994, a show that showed glimpses of promise but ultimately kept falling over its own feet.

Don't worry, fellow Brits, for the UK was still being represented by *Red Dwarf*. Having started in 1988, *Red Dwarf* would

continue to run off and through the '90s. *Star Trek* may have its well-spoken Picard and strong-willed female characters, but Lister's urges for beer and kebab are ones we can all relate to. Plus, Danny John-Jules' Cat was cool at one point. Honestly. He was. Don't judge him on the more recent *Red Dwarf* series. Many a time we've moved and screamed like Cat back in the day. And then, on a more serious note, there was the Doctor.

Despite being taken off the air in 1989, *Doctor Who* would make a return of sorts in a 1996 television movie. At that time owned by Universal, the Doctor transitioned from Sylvester McCoy to Paul McGann early in the film. The movie would prove popular with UK audiences, but poor US viewings led to Universal deciding against a new series. Universal would let the rights to the character expire and revert back to the BBC, although the Doctor would remain dormant for the rest of the decade.

Whilst we were given a plethora of often pointless sequels, the '90s would deliver its share of classic horror movies and moments. On the small screen, *Tales from the Crypt* was still being dished up, and it was joined by a branded cash-in known as *Poltergeist: Legacy*. With 1992 having brought the Kristy Swanson-starring *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* movie, this would lead to Joss Whedon's 1997 TV series of the same name. Achieving cult status amongst many genre fans, the *Buffy* show is still heralded as a breath of fresh air to this day. That would in turn then spawn 1999's *Angel* spin-off show.

For fans of horror shows with a strong narrative, enter Shaun Cassidy's *American Gothic*. Often overlooked, *American Gothic* was chilling. With Gary Cole as local sheriff/supernaturally-powered murdering rapist Lucas Buck, the show also benefited from great turns from Lucas Black, Jake Weber and a pre-American Horror Story Sarah Paulson. The show was criminally canned after just one season.

Similarly comprised of a strong narrative is the TV miniseries adaptation of Stephen King's classic *IT*. Initially shown to UK audiences in two parts over two Saturday nights on BBC1, *IT* has a great eerie quality about it. Well, until the ridiculous spider transformation, that is. Sadly, King's *The Tommyknockers* would fare less well when that got the miniseries treatment.

On the big screen, remakes appeared for the likes of *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Mummy*, *Village of the Damned* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, whilst fear-inducing names like Michael Myers, Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees, Pinhead, Norman Bates, Chuck, Leatherface and those relentless Children of the Corn would all reappear. Added to these monsters, 1992 saw Tony Todd deliver an eloquently-brutal turn as the lead in *Candyman*, Mark Jones gave Warwick Davis top billing in 1993's *The Leprechaun*, then Wes Craven gave horror aficionados a slasher film that changed the rules of the subgenre in 1996's *Scream*. *Candyman*, *The Leprechaun* and *Scream* would all spawn multiple sequels, with the most ludicrous ones befalling Davis' Leprechaun character – yes, we got to see the evil Leprechaun in Vegas, in space, and in 'tha' hood. But it was *Scream* that flipped horror on its head. Forget what you thought you knew, after decades of stale, predictable plots, the slasher movie was refreshed and revitalised by Craven.

Away from *Scream*, the mystical, mythical side of horror got spruced up with favourites like 1996's *The Craft* and Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*. An effortlessly-cool movie, *From Dusk Till Dawn* was the best vampire movie to come along since 1987's *The Lost Boys*, combining snappy Quentin Tarantino dialogue with splatter gore. There was also gems like Peter Jackson's 1996 *The Frighteners*, *Stigmata*, *Sleepy Hollow* and *Troma's Terror Firmer*, not to mention creature features like *Lake Placid* and *Anaconda*. 1999 brought the best shark





film since *Jaws*, Renny Harlin's *Deep Blue Sea*.

Whereas *Scream* revitalised the played-out slasher movie, Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick's 1999 *The Blair Witch Project* gave another kick up the arse to the horror genre as a whole. Introducing the notion of found-footage horror, the movie's shoestring budget brought in nearly \$250 million, changing the industry as a result. Similarly, 1998's *Ring* saw the rise of J-horror.

Forget the current hard-on for superhero movies, the '90s was vastly different. Despite Burton's *Batman Returns* doing well in '92, the Dark Knight was subjected to Bat-nipples, Joker-like villains, horrible dialogue and 'Forever'-expiring credit cards by the time Joel Schumacher had given audiences 1995's *Batman Forever* and 1997's *Batman & Robin*. Elsewhere, '91 saw the short-lived TV series *The Flash*, with John Wesley Shipp as the Scarlet Speedster, whilst the decade saw Dean Cain as a loved-up Boy Scout in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*. There was also the *Swamp Thing* series, following on from the '80s movies and faring very badly. The Marvel front saw the painful pair of 1990's *Captain America* and Roger Corman's 1994 *The Fantastic Four* fall flat (the latter even went unreleased). '98 would bring David Hasselhoff in the cheese-tastic *Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and also show a sign of things to come with *Blade*. Directed by Stephen Norrington, *Blade*, along with Bryan Singer's *X-Men* in 2000, paved the way for the superhero boom of the 2000s and beyond. Lesser known heroes such as *Darkman*, *The Rocketeer*, *Tank Girl*, *The Phantom* and *Spawn* would achieve varying levels of success, and then there was the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise that is best remembered for Vanilla Ice amping up the T.U.R.T.L.E. Power.

One of the best films to come out of that period, though, was Alex Proyas' adaptation of James O'Barr's *The Crow* in 1994. Tied together by a stunning performance from Brandon Lee, fatally shot dead on set, *The Crow* is one of the first movies to have a

darker, R-rated hero. The mythos of *The Crow* would continue to soar, bringing 1996's *The Crow: City of Angels* and 1998's TV series *The Crow: Stairway to Heaven*. The legacy would continue into the 2000s with *The Crow: Salvation* and *The Crow: Wicked Prayer*.

Whilst *Terminator 2* was one of the first huge movies of the '90s, others received plenty of attention. If David Cronenberg's 1991 *Naked Lunch* stumbled, it was nothing compared to *The Lawnmower Man*. The 1991 Pierce Brosnan-starrer's virtual reality spin was set to change the world. Except that it really didn't. Still, it could be worse: it could be *The Lawnmower Man 2*. Of a much higher standard, the 1995 anime sci-fi *Ghost in the Shell*, from Mamoru Oshii, and 1999's *The Iron Giant*, from Brad Bird, progressed technology significantly.

Big spectacle movies, like Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* and Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black*, wowed audiences. *Alien 3* saw the return of the Xenomorph, while the relatively poor reception to 1997's *Alien Resurrection* ensured that the creature wouldn't see the light of a cinema screen again for another seven years. The '90s also saw the end of the line for the *Gremlins* and *Back to the Future* franchises. Luckily, Jean-Claude Van Damme's *Universal Soldier* franchise still has legs to this day...

Whilst this writer would love to talk about how great *Double Dragon*, *Escape from L.A.* and *Frankenhooker* (seriously!) are, there were two huge movies towards the end of the decade: *The Matrix* and the return of the greatest saga of all time (yes, I said it), *Star Wars*.

The Wachowski brothers blew people away when they debuted *The Matrix* in 1999. It even looked as if Ted Theodore Logan had actually become a real actor. Despite two shoddy sequels, *The Matrix* had taken the SFX of the likes of *Total Recall* and *T2* and pushed them to a whole new orbit. Then there was *The Phantom Menace*.

It had been 16 years since 1983's *Return of the Jedi*, and many had come to terms with the idea that there would never be another *Star Wars* movie. Then George Lucas announced three of them! *Episode I's* anticipation was unfathomable. People slept on the streets just to see the trailer. Despite horrible dialogue (and Jar-Jar Binks), fans were treated to a visually-stunning movie with some immensely impressive lightsaber duels, a baddie that was a total badass, more R2-D2, and it was a mother flippin' *Star Wars* film that we never, ever thought we'd see. People seem to forget, when we first watched the likes of *Star Wars*, *Empire* and *Jedi*, we were kids and absolutely loved it. Looking back on those films, the dialogue is often equally as horrible as *Episode I's* chatter and the action is just as kid-orientated. And when all is said and done, it could be worse: it could be *Attack of the Clones*.





The twenty-first century is when everything changes... and STARBURST was ready.

From the immersive visual effects of *Gravity* and *The Avengers* to the cinematic quality of series like *The Walking Dead* and *Doctor Who*, it's amazing how different cinema and TV are today compared to fourteen years ago – and yet the seeds of today's media can be found sown among the soils of 2000.

Moving away from that crap metaphor, one of the big blockbusters of 2000 was Bryan Singer's *X-Men*, introducing a whole host of mutant guys and gals to cinemagoers and foreshadowing one of the big trends of the decade – the superhero movie.

Peter Jackson kicked off his epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in 2001, a lengthy adaptation of Tolkien's classics that concluded two years later. Favouring in-camera effects over computer trickery, with 500 featured cast and 26,000+ extras, Frodo's long walk to Mordor was a piece of fantasy filmmaking on a scale never before (or since) seen.

On the smaller screen, *Smallville* and *Star Trek: Enterprise* began in 2001, followed by *Firefly* in 2002. Headed by Joss Whedon, whose *Buffy* continued airing until 2003, *Firefly* followed the mismatched crew of space cruiser *Serenity* on the run from the oppressive Alliance. Its unfortunate cancellation after one season is one of the big regrets of the decade, but at least fan campaigning managed to get a feature film follow-up in 2005's *Serenity*. That Whedon guy, he's going somewhere.

Also in 2002, Peter Parker gained arachnid powers and battled the Green Goblin in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*, and the mysteries of the Clone Wars were finally revealed in *Star Wars Episode II*, which thankfully contained less Gungans than last time around (even if the one time Jar Jar did appear, he practically caused galaxy-wide war).

Speaking of series that started off a lot better, 2003 saw not one, but two disappointing sequels to *The Matrix*, as well as *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, a washbuckling fantasy adventure that would later have its own inferior follow-ups. Hey, at least that year's

The by KIERON MOORE 21st Century



STARBURST



X-2 was a pretty good sequel, as was 2004's *Spider-Man 2*, which pitted Alfred Molina's gangly Doctor Octopus against Tobey Maguire's hero.

2004 also saw two smaller-budgeted big successes. Billboards asking "Have you seen Saw?" signalled the beginning of the torture porn trend, which over the next ten years would cover a lot of people in a lot of blood. Speaking of people with red on them, self-styled "zom-rom-com" *Shaun of the Dead* catapulted Simon Pegg, Nick Frost and Edgar Wright to fame with its hilarious take on the zombie apocalypse. On TV, *Battlestar Galactica* flew again, *Stargate Atlantis* opened up, and Oceanic Airlines Flight 815 became *LOST* on a mysterious island.

And one of the biggest sci-fi phenomena of recent years appeared on TV in 2005 – after a sixteen-year absence, Russell T. Davies brought the thrill of travelling through time and space to a new generation by reviving *Doctor Who*, casting Christopher Eccleston as the eponymous Time Lord, soon to be followed by David Tennant. With better production values and strongly developed characters, 'New Who' played a big part in increasing the mainstream credibility and popular appeal of sci-fi TV – it seems everyone's a Doctor Who fan these days.

Across the pond, and in a galaxy far, far away, the *Star Wars* saga ended, temporarily at least, with the explosive *Revenge of the Sith*. But as one tale ends, another begins. Specifically, *Batman Begins*. Christopher Nolan's noir-infused style resulted in a moody, brutal take on the Caped Crusader that, in being the complete antithesis of *Batman and Robin*'s camp antics, earned the affection of audiences and critics worldwide.

2006 saw two more big entries to the superhero genre; *X-Men: The Last Stand* was the weakest in the trilogy, perhaps because Bryan Singer had ran off to make *Superman Returns*. Another big comic

adaptation that year was *V for Vendetta*, but the real highlight was Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, a masterpiece of fantasy and myth set against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War.

But was it really 2006 or was it 1973? That's what Manchester copper Sam Tyler was asking in *Life on Mars*, which begun on TV that year alongside *Heroes* and *Doctor Who* spin-off *Torchwood*, shortly followed by *The Sarah Jane Adventures*.

Raimi's *Spider-Man* trilogy shot itself in the foot with 2007's messy third instalment, while characters in Michael Bay's latest cinematic headache were busy shooting at the nasty *Transformers* smashing up their cities.

At the other end of the budget spectrum, *Paranormal Activity* was the unexpected success of 2007 – made for about \$15,000, this minimalist horror (it's two people in a house) raked up almost \$200 million, making it the most profitable film ever made and enticing low budget filmmakers all over the world to make their own found footage horrors. Now can someone please tell them all to stop?

2008 saw two milestones in the superhero genre. Nolan's *The Dark Knight* was even more acclaimed than its predecessor, especially for the late Heath Ledger's terrifyingly grungy and sadistic incarnation of the Joker. Marvel, meanwhile, released *The Incredible Hulk* and *Iron Man*, between them signalling the beginning of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Also this year, the *Twilight* saga began its sparkly take on the vampire mythos, Pixar released the poignant *Wall-E*, and *Star Wars* began its long-running Clone Wars series.

The two biggest genre films of 2009 were sci-fi blockbusters – James Cameron shoved his pioneering new VFX in our faces in *Avatar*, his immensely successful 3D remake of *Dances with Wolves*, while Chris Pike took to

the bridge of the Enterprise in the *Star Trek* reboot. The year also saw two remarkable debuts from promising new filmmakers – Duncan Jones' *Moon* and Neil Blomkamp's *District 9*. It's also the year in which *Mega Shark vs. Giant Octopus* came out.

In 2010, Jeff Bridges returned to the world of *Tron* with sequel *Legacy*, Robert Downey Jr. donned his *Iron Man* armour again for a disappointing sequel, and Aaron Taylor-Johnson kicked ass in Matthew Vaughn's anarchic *Kick-Ass*. Christopher Nolan, meanwhile, took a break from his Bat-trilogy to guide us through the labyrinthine world of dreams in clever sci-fi thriller *Inception*.

This is also the year in which *The Walking Dead* first lurched onto our screens. Much has been discussed about TV drama "catching up" to cinema in recent years, with visuals becoming cinematic, big name stars and directors moving across, and long-form dramas that can be binged on via box sets or Netflix. While *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad* are among the examples often quoted, *The Walking Dead* is the series where this trend crosses over with genre material. The *Shawshank Redemption* director Frank Darabont and "that bloke off Love, Actually" were the big names which attracted viewers to this bold post-apocalyptic serial, while it's the compelling character stories and dramatic cliffhangers that kept them coming back. Despite Darabont's departure and a slow second season, the series has since grown in strength, and Andrew Lincoln is now forever "that bloke off *Walking Dead*".

In 2011, the *Planet of the Apes* series was given a new lease of life, with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* redeeming it from Tim Burton's slated attempt, as were the *X-Men*; First Class saw James McAvoy make Professor X young and sexy (no offence, Patrick). This year also saw Duncan Jones' *Source Code* (a.k.a. *Groundhog Day* on an exploding train), J.J. Abrams' Spielbergian *Super 8*, and Joe Cornish's alien invasion satire *Attack the Block*. Oh yeah, and the





Marvel Cinematic Universe added two of its stalwarts, Thor and Captain America. But it wasn't until 2012 that this universe would reach its peak...

Yes, *The Avengers*, or *Avengers Assemble* if you prefer, scripted and directed by Joss Whedon (told you he'd go somewhere), did a very impressive job of balancing the heroes introduced into this world so far and testing them in an exhilarating conflict with Tom Hiddleston's iconic Loki. It had taken a while to crack the formula, but now that it was possible to make flying dudes not look naïf, the Marvel Comics universe had been successfully brought to the screen, and fans loved it. It wasn't the only big superhero film of the year – Christopher Nolan rounded off his Bat-trilogy with *The Dark Knight Rises*. Drawing influences from *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Knightfall*, this finale pitted Bats against Bane, who was leading a particularly violent sect of the Occupy movement.

And yet, even against these two big-hitters, 2012 brought a lot more great movies. *The Amazing Spider-Man* saw Andrew Garfield don the iconic suit, while another big comic adaptation came in the form of *Dredd*, clearing our minds of Sylvester Stallone's attempt. *The Hunger Games* kicked off a great sci-fi series with both a satirical edge and that elusive rarity, a strong female lead. Plus, Ridley Scott returned to the world of *Alien* with *Prometheus*, Peter Jackson returned to Middle-earth with *The Hobbit*, *The Cabin in the Woods* gave us a knowing take on the entire horror genre, Hammer returned in style with *The Woman in Black*, and James Bond celebrated his fiftieth with *Skyfall*.

Lots of sequels dominated the market in 2013 – *Iron Man 3*, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Thor: The Generic Sub-title*, *The Hobbit: Are We Nearly There Yet*, and *Star Trek Into Gravitational Shots of Alice Eve's Underwear*. DC's *Man of Steel* saw Superman rebooted – with Zack Snyder at the helm and Christopher Nolan producing,

it wanted to do for Supes what the *Dark Knight* trilogy did for Batman, yet also wanted to sow the seeds for DC's version of the Marvel Cinematic Universe; whether it succeeded in either is up for debate.

We did get some great sci-fi films not based on existing properties, too: *The World's End* rounded off the Cornetto trilogy in style, Neill Blomkamp gave us explosive class divide parable *Elysium*, and Alfonso Cuarón wowed with the immersive *Gravity* and its actually-not-rubbish 3D.

The Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. expanded Marvel's universe onto TV screens, while *Doctor Who* made the opposite jump as fiftieth anniversary special *The Day of the Doctor* was broadcast to cinemas worldwide. A roaring ratings success, this episode saw incumbent Doctor Matt Smith team up with audience favourite David Tennant and 'forgotten' incarnation John Hurt in the culmination of eight years of moping about the Time War.

And that brings us all the way to 2014. The year of the Twelfth Doctor, and of *The LEGO Movie*, the *Winter Soldier*, the *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *RoboCop*, *Godzilla*, and so much more. *STARBURST* issue 400 isn't starved for material to talk about, but what about issue 410, 500, or even 800?

Well, Marvel is going from strength to strength, and though we're not too optimistic for those attempting to mimic them, the comic book movie may be here to stay. We can't wait to see whether the *Star Wars* sequels will bring back the magic of the original trilogy, and what other big blockbusters will benefit from the great VFX advances recent years have brought. Besides this, though, it's the Duncan Joneses and Neill Blomkamps of the world we're really going to be looking out for – the promising filmmakers that we can't wait to see more from.

Bring on the next 400 issues!

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A long time ago in an issue far, far away....

BY JACK BOTTOMLEY



STARBURST WAS THE VERY FIRST UK MAGAZINE TO COVER STAR WARS, SO IT'S ONLY FITTING THAT AS PART OF OUR 400TH ISSUE FESTIVITIES (WE HAVE MAX REBO PLAYING HERE AT HQ IN CELEBRATION), WE LOOK BACK AT THE ASCENSION OF THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON THAT HAS EVOLVED ALONG SIDE US...

Star Wars is iconic. The movies, television series and merchandise have combined to make its unique universe an undying bright light in the media galaxy. Of course, this hasn't always been true - icons are rarely pre-determined and in the case of George Lucas' space adventure, this film was as risky as they came.

To begin our long journey across the Dune Sea of success, we must first cast our minds back to a time when magazines featured adverts for projectors, the inclusion of coloured pages was deemed worthy of a cover line, and when film journalist Sam Dell had just seen a movie he described as "The cinematic experience of a lifetime." It was November 1st 1977, and a new UK publication dedicated to 'Science Fantasy in Television, Cinema and Comix' was heralding the imminent arrival of a movie that was causing quite a stir across seas...

STAR WARS

Prior to its release, Lucas was so sure *Star Wars* would flop that he made plans to move to Hawaii and missed the premiere (it was during this time he and Spielberg conjured up the idea for that little *Raiders of the Lost Ark* film). It wasn't just the filmmaker that was unsure about his creation, the project had always been considered a gamble: Universal Pictures

turned it down flat and even eventual backers 20th Century Fox had to force some cinemas to screen it by threatening to remove potential blockbuster *The Other Side of Midnight* (1977) from those that declined. (Ironically *Midnight* didn't even make 10% of what *Star Wars* did.) So many showed a disturbing lack of faith, proclaiming Lucas and the crew had committed career suicide (Steven Spielberg being the exception - he asserted the film would gross millions) and that taking a salary from the merchandising was a crackpot manoeuvre. Well, like the citizens of Alderaan, all were suddenly silenced (too soon?) come the film's release and even if that had been it, *Star Wars* was and still is Lucas' victory. But it had been a gruelling path Lucas had taken. Its development had been as vast as the Death Star, the script changes ranging from the protagonist's names, races and species (Han Solo originally had green skin and gills) to drastic setting rewrites. Tatooine was originally a jungle, but filming would have been too challenging and so the desert planet was born (filmed in Tozeur, Tunisia - where many of the sets still sit). But this too provided its fair share of challenges - as we noted back in issue #1, C-3PO melted, Kenny Baker and Anthony Daniels could barely see and Baker often had porn taped inside the R2-D2 interior by the crew too (it was a literal boob trap, if you will!).

Lucas' aims were (to reference John

Brosnan's 'The Making of Star Wars' article in *STARBURST* #1) to give "young people an honest, wholesome, fantasy life, the kind my generation had. The plot is simple - good vs evil - and the film is designed to be all the fun things and fantasy things I remember." Indeed, Lucas had originally aimed to adapt the *Flash Gordon* serials or the Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels that inspired him. The world was soon to be better off that he wasn't able to pursue either, with *Star Wars* being released Stateside on May 25th 1977 to a response that shocked all (Spielberg aside of course). The film was a smash hit, quickly inspiring a sizeable fan base that would provide the foundations for the phenomenon to follow. It was only while watching news reports Lucas realised he had become rich, and the cast had become instant stars (Ford was almost ravaged by fans when visiting a music store around the time of release). *Star Wars* became a financial legend, taking over \$6 million in a weekend (over \$27 million in today's terms) and initially taking over \$220 million domestically (over \$856 million today). Expanding that (as international releases opened) to \$410 million worldwide. This total widened further thanks to re-issues in 1978, 79, 80, 81 and 82, which left a grand total of \$530 million worldwide, placing *Star Wars* as the highest grossing film of all time, until 1983's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. Even now, after the 1997 remastered releases

(leading up to the prequels). *Star Wars* is the third-highest grossing film ever made (adjusted for inflation) worldwide (behind *Gone with the Wind* and *Avatar*).

It was only natural that STARBURST would celebrate *Star Wars* and its success, but back then who could have predicted just what was to happen over the next three decades? As we said back in #1, "The big question now is - where does George Lucas go from here? Like Orson Welles with his classic *Citizen Kane*, Lucas is going to find it difficult to top *Star Wars*." Well, we were young, and had yet to see the next film in the Saga, 1981's *The Empire Strikes Back*. Before that though (and we must mention this, we apologise), there was an awkward turn in the road to the next film. Yes, as you can probably guess, it's time to revisit...

THE STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL

Originally there were intentions of a spin-off series to this infamous 1978 television special; needless to say they were disintegrated shortly after. This TV film saw Han, Luke and Leia attempting to get Chewbacca home to his family to celebrate his "Life Day". Well, sadly it wasn't a happy Life Day for Chewie, or anyone for that matter. Though this confounding misfire featured the star power of Hamill, Fisher and Ford, it was the biggest tragedy the 'Galaxy far, far away' had experienced since Order 66. Don't just take our word for it, even the maker himself agreed, as Lucas tried to buy all the copies of the film so it could never be broadcast again. While he failed, the special has never since officially been released on home video, but copies are out there much to Lucas' dismay - "If I had the time and a sledgehammer," he once said, "I would track down every bootlegged copy of that program and smash it." But it wasn't all bad - *The Holiday Special* did after all introduce fans to future favourite Boba Fett, via an animated segment, and it was the first *Star Wars* film/media to credit James Earl Jones as the voice of Darth Vader!

The Star Wars Holiday Special may have been a wampa among the tauntauns but it did leave interesting questions heading forward. Success, now more than ever, is not always accepted. A sole success is not enough; anyone can score a victory but it is what follows that is the true test. Well, by that logic Lucas cleaved such expectation in half going forward, and like Obi-Wan Kenobi in *A New Hope*, such thoughts simply vanished (well, kind of)

and *The Holiday Special* came to be largely forgotten/ignored.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Like its big screen predecessor, *The Empire Strikes Back* was a monumental success (grossing \$538,375,067 worldwide) and despite the initial mixed reception among some of the critics (ourselves included!) it is now largely considered the greatest film of the franchise. *Star Wars* (by now renamed *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*) boasted ambition and groundbreaking scope; this sequel took it a step further, offering perhaps the most memorable cinematic twist in history (certainly the most homaged/parodied). Lucas handed over directorial reins to the late great Irvin Kershner (who actually was not a fan of the first film, but was persuaded by Lucas) with character-defining results. *Empire* built Luke's character into a fully-realised hero figure, constructed the Leia/Solo love story and debuted (on the big screen) hugely popular new characters like bounty hunter Boba Fett (Jeremy Bulloch), Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams, originally a contender for the Solo role) and Jedi Master Yoda (Frank Oz). The plot zapped from set-piece to set-piece and accompanied by John Williams' legendary score defined the word epic for its generation and any other. The worldwide success of the first film made sure that this sequel made it to screens more easily, but there were still many issues. For instance, the dramatic opening crawl in *A New Hope* lacked actor/crew credits, but this was allowed due to the low expectations of the film. Nevertheless, Lucas wanted to maintain this technique for *Empire*, much to the chagrin of the Writers' Guild and Directors' Guild, who first attempted to pull the film and then fined Lucas and Kershner. Lucas paid the fees and dissolved his membership to both guilds - a move that has affected his choice of cast in later *Star Wars* films.

RETURN OF THE JEDI

By 1983 *Star Wars* had long ceased being a constant gamble, and George Lucas' brainchild had become far more than just a simple sci-fi adventure - it was now the bona fide cultural phenomenon it was destined to be. But that doesn't mean *Return of the Jedi* had it smoother than the previous two; in fact it times its inception was rougher than Rancor hides! From Harrison Ford's disinterest in his role (he



desperately wanted Solo to be killed off), to the rumoured fallout between Lucas and David Prowse, *RotJ* had its fair share of interesting problems along the way. Welsh director Richard Marquand (*Eye of the Needle*) took on directing duties for the film (the only non-American to direct a *Star Wars* feature), although David Lynch was originally offered the job (as was David Cronenberg) but turned it down and went on to direct *Dune* (1984) instead.

Return of the Jedi made \$475,106,177 at the box office and drew great reviews (although many have since called it the lesser of the original trilogy). The film concluded the Skywalker journey but (thanks to Lawrence Kasdan's work on the script) actually left scope for the prequels' look at the fall of Anakin Skywalker and emergence of Darth Vader. The film, like the last, was dark in tone but far more upbeat in resolution (despite that terrible ewok death; even now our dreams are plagued by Romba trying to awaken the lifeless Nanta). The film also saw the end of numerous popular characters from the dignified death of Master Yoda, to the redeemed demise of Darth Vader, to the clumsy fate of Boba Fett, who fell victim to the sarlaac. It properly introduced the Emperor too, who was seen briefly via hologram in *Empire*, played by Clive Revill, but it was here that Ian McDiarmid's seething master manipulator was fully realised - another springboard for the Palpatine sub-plot of the eventual prequel trilogy.

In the years following *RotJ*'s release, several spin-off projects emerged that, while not as poorly received as the aforementioned *Holiday Special*, failed to adequately keep the spirit of *Star Wars* alive in the hearts of the public. First up, the rag-clad, Stormtrooper-smashing teddy





bears got their own features in the *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* (1984) and *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor* (1985). These TV movies (released theatrically in the UK) failed to satiate the masses at the time, but have since become cult favourites amongst hardened *Star Wars* fans. In addition to these live action ventures, the animated series *Ewoks* ran for two seasons (from 1985-1987), as well as another called *Droids* (which ran for a single season from 1985-86), featuring R2-D2 and C-3PO's adventures pre-*A New Hope*.

THE SPECIAL EDITIONS

Though he'd admitted to being burnt out from the stresses of *Star Wars* post-*ROTJ*, George Lucas couldn't resist revisiting his creation forever, and in 1993 Lucasfilm began work on new versions of the trilogy which would utilise their own technological advancements in computer generated effects. Timed for release around *A New Hope*'s 20th anniversary, the first of the *Star Wars* 'Special Editions' was unveiled to a rapturous response. That's not to say everybody was happy with what Lucas had done with their beloved movies - the biggest bone of contention to this day being the decision to digitally manipulate who shot first: Han, or Greedo (the revisionist thinking behind this tweak is that the original cut made a hero out

of a cold-blooded killer, something that an older Lucas was now uncomfortable with). Fans were right to be frustrated with examples such as the latter (and the inclusion of a non-puppet, poorly rendered Jabba the Hutt in *A New Hope*), but the Special Editions do also contain many improvements. Regardless, *Star Wars* fans were soon to have something else to obsess over, with George Lucas timing these releases with the announcement of...

THE PREQUEL TRILOGY

The news sent tractor beams of excitement throughout the *Star Wars* fanbase, drawing everyone closer to the official release date of May 1999 (in the US anyway - we got the film officially in July). What *Star Wars*: Episode I: *The Phantom Menace* brought upon release was far from the familiar, in fact it was a drastic change of pace. The film was a financial hit and (thanks to a subsequent 3D re-release in 2012) eventually crossed the billion dollar mark worldwide. Surprisingly, *The Phantom Menace* saw director George Lucas taking an even more central role within his universe than ever before, returning to the director's chair for the first time since *A New Hope*. Utilising digital wizardry (only one shot in the entire film was not aided by CGI - the gas being released in the Trade Federation Control Ship meeting room), Lucas' first prequel

told a different story - one of political turmoil and a budding prophecy that the core Jedi masters were justifiably unsure about (take note kids, always listen to the little green man!).

With the film being one of the most anticipated in modern history, it was always going to struggle to meet all the hype, and its reception was mixed at best. But *The Phantom Menace* is a far deeper film than given credit for. Much like the original trilogy embellished religious iconography and took influence from WWII films (most notably *The Dambusters*) and the work of Akira Kurosawa, *The Phantom Menace* and its sequels boast a great many meanings. The film was a relatively simple journey of a boy called Anakin (Jake Lloyd) becoming a Jedi, but with the addition of the Sith, the franchise created an even greater light/dark narrative conflict. The film used politics (many of which were relevant to the real world) as a gateway for evil's ascension to power and presented a journey that was not always action-packed, but was meditative in approach. This may have split fans but *The Phantom Menace* built towards a greater picture, further elaborated upon by the next film in Lucas' prequel series, *Attack of the Clones* (2002).

After the first film presented a Trade Federation-like technical majesty (in contrast to the early days of immersive sets, costly shoots and location scouting), this sequel took it further. Costing \$120 million, it is the most expensive *Star Wars* feature to date and was something of a groundbreaker, being shot on digital video using a new 24-frame High-Definition Progressive Scan camera. Though financially successful, the film similarly received a mixed reception (though fared better than *The Phantom Menace*) but likewise was an expansion on the themes as well as the plot. Palpatine's ascension through the senate bared parallels to how Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany and the movie's wartime politics have since been compared to those of the Iraq conflict (the following 2008-2014 *Clone Wars* TV series also alluded to this).

Attack of the Clones linked more events to the original trilogy (which was expected, as the series progressed), with an introduction to Mandalorian papa Jango Fett, a reference to the origins of the Death Star and a start for Anakin's submergence into "more machine than man" mode. *Attack of the Clones* introduced and made central focus of *The Clone Wars*



(briefly mentioned in *A New Hope*) and was a film of many firsts. This was, for instance, the first film to use a digital Yoda (although the Blu-ray release of *The Phantom Menace* digitalised Yoda for continuity's sake) to aid the green fella's first lightsaber fight of the series with Count Dooku (Christopher Lee). *Attack of the Clones* essentially introduced full-blown war to the Star Wars universe and focused on Padmé (Natalie Portman) and Anakin's (Hayden Christensen) forbidden love - a big factor heading into perhaps the most overtly tragic film of the series, 2005's *Revenge of the Sith*.

Before the release of *Revenge of the Sith*, Genndy Tartakovsky made the Cartoon Network animated series *The Clone Wars* (2003-2005). The three seasons long show consisted of 5-minute episodes, and drew much acclaim. The series introduced and explained many aspects of the forthcoming film, in particular Anakin's battle scar and the introduction of antagonist cyborg General Grievous. In hindsight, these episodes, while vastly different from Dave Filoni's future 2008 CG animated series *The Clone Wars*, was similarly faithful in connecting the dots. Still it was all part of the grand plotting tie up that was *Revenge of the Sith* and come May 2005, the circle was now complete. (Ok, so we now know otherwise, but at the time we really thought it was.)

By this point STARBURST had grown up alongside *Star Wars* and it was a mightily emotional moment witnessing *Revenge of the Sith*. Upon release the film performed brilliantly at the box office and moreover is considered by most as the biggest prequel success (scoring favourable critical and audience reviews). *Revenge of the Sith* is arguably the darkest *Star Wars* film of all, bringing Anakin's descent to a tragic head and revealing just how Darth Vader came to be born, in addition to showing how Palpatine (now unveiled as Sith Lord Darth Sidious - ya don't say!) came to name himself the Emperor. Much like the prior prequels, *Revenge of the Sith* featured vast digital scope with over 2,200 visual effects shots (more than the last two films combined). To show how

much the series has embraced new technologies, remember *A New Hope* featured only 350 of these types of shots!

From the death of major characters to the literal wrist-slashing ordeal that was Order 66, this was an emotionally motivated entry in the saga. Lucas' final directorial role in *Star Wars* was one which left viewers with a rounded view of the Skywalker journey.

THE CLONE WARS

RoTS may have been the perceived end but since that point there has been even more expansions. Enter Dave Filoni's animated feature film *The Clone Wars* (2008) and the subsequent series, which ran for an incredible six seasons, comprising of 121 episodes. *The Clone Wars* presented characters old and new, and evolved into a highly refined series. The animation was contemporary CG, yet inspired by the aesthetic of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*; the design team bringing a subtle, marionette-like quality to the look and physicality of its stars. As the series evolved, the visual scope improved, as can be witnessed in the stunning lightsaber duels and action set-pieces. In fact, the series presented mini sagas of its own, from the Malevolence trilogy in Season 1, to the bounty hunter saga of Season 4, to perhaps the best-received arc of the show in Season 5's Mandalore/Sith saga. The series is actually a big factor in the recent evolution of *Star Wars*, and its presentation of popular new characters, such as Jedi Padawan Ahsoka Tano, further illustrates how the franchise continues to recruit new fans of all ages.

THE IMPERIAL MERCH

Star Wars' continued cultural relevance is no more evident than when we look at how shelves are still dominated by its products - ranging from new waves of the traditional 3.75" action figures, to toothpaste and Lightsabre chopsticks! The merchandising techniques of *Star Wars* may have become the subject of ridicule (in films such as Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs*), but the integral attachment *Star Wars* has built over the years between products and picture changed the way blockbusters were marketed. Before *Star Wars*, tie-in merchandise was not such a grand aspect of the filmmaking process, but since then studios have largely become dependant on it. But rather than simply being cash-ins, the *Star Wars* toys, books and collectables have enriched its universe, heightening background characters, building backstories and in many cases created mass fandom for characters with



virtually no screen time (IG-88 for the win!). The total franchise revenue is a staggering \$27,000,000,000 and box office sales account for merely \$4,277,000,000 of that figure; the rest is home video, book, game and, most of all, toys sales.

LAUGH IT UP, FUZZBALL!

When discussing the ongoing success of *Star Wars*, consider how the saga has opened itself up to parody you must. Mel Brooks' film *Spaceballs* (1987), may first spring to mind, but even earlier examples can be found (see '70s sci-fi spoof series, *Quark*). However, Lucasfilm has later come to work with some sources, creating fully backed *Star Wars* parodies, which led to further market conquests. The first major Lucasfilm approved parody was 2007's *Robot Chicken: Star Wars*, which came about when Lucas was impressed with a *Star Wars* skit on the show. The stop-motion mini-series poked fun, but also reflected the cult popularity of characters like Admiral Akbar and even Pondo Baba (the literally disarmed fella in *A New Hope's* cantina scene).

This led to a Lucasfilm backed series of spoofs, from the Original *Star Wars* trilogy themed





Family Guy spin-off TV films (*Blue Harvest*, *Something, Something, Something Darkside* and *It's A Trap!*). As well as the fully approved spoof comedy *Fanboys* (set before 1999 and featuring cameos from actual *Star Wars* actors). This openness from Lucasfilm allowed mini sagas and brands to become a possibility and prolong the popularity of the saga. See the likes of *Lego Star Wars* (which has spawned eight TV movies and four video games) and the recent *Star Wars*-ised versions of popular smartphone game, *Angry Birds*. Lucasfilm's acceptance of spoofery has created avenues to new audiences and continually revitalised the *Star Wars* name in pop culture.

EU SUMMIT

The Expanded Universe refers to *Star Wars* stories told outside of the movies and *The Clone Wars* series. Though the subject of canon will always be a touchy subject for the

fanbase, the appetite for these Expanded Universe adventures has grown exponentially over the years, and has seen countless books, comics and videogames released to cater for demand. Although oft-credited as the start of the EU, Alan Dean Foster's 1978 spin-off novel *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* was beaten to the punch just a few months earlier by Marvel Comics, who, after wrapping up their 6-part adaptation of *Star Wars*, promised "New Planets, New Perils!" from issue 7 onwards. Another integral turning point in the EU was *West End Games' Star Wars Roleplaying Game* (1987). The game heightened the imaginations of the fans and gave audiences a freer reign to create stories and adventures. *West End Games' products* were the structure the EU desired, rendering alphabets (that were initially just set intricacies) into coherent dialogues and creating vast detail and databases on characters (big and small) from the films.

From that point on the EU has only grown, with the revered '90s Timothy Zahn series *The Thrawn* trilogy, which occurs post-*RotJ*, still cited by many fans as the best *Star Wars* films never made. Then Dark Horse comics followed on, purchasing the *Star Wars* literary license and creating the *Dark Empire* series. Both were a contributing factor leading to the prequels and it all amounted to a literal revolution and made the EU into less of a fanbase and more of a way of life for followers of all things *Star Wars*.

THE FUTURE...

If this lengthy look back at *Star Wars'* progression from 1977 to now tells us anything, it is that, like the stretching sands of Tatooine, the future of the franchise is endless. Many may well have gulped at the announcement of a new, Lucas-less, Disney produced *Star Wars* trilogy back in October '12, but subsequent *Episode VII* developments such as the hiring of J.J. Abrams, the promise of more practical effects in favour of CGI, and the confirmation of John Williams' continued involvement (to name but three examples) have convinced

us that the saga is in safe hands after all. Disney have also discussed plans to expand the universe even further, with standalone feature films focussing on individual characters (everybody from Boba Fett to a young Han Solo has been rumoured to be stepping into the spotlight), and live-action TV specials (including one rumoured to revolve around Darth Vader himself). Besides the fact *Episode VII* will be set thirty some years after the events of *RotJ*, focus on a new trio of young leads and feature appearances by "some very familiar faces" (R2-D2 being the only one confirmed at the time of going to print), Disney are keeping details close to their chest. With principal photography officially scheduled to start this very month, it won't be long before the shroud of secrecy starts to fall. But before *Episode VII* or any live-action project hits our screens, we have *Star Wars Rebels* to look forward to. Launching later this year, the animated series is the successor to *The Clone Wars*, and sees many of that show's creative team returning to guide it (turn to page 40 for a full preview!).

STARBURST is now 37 years old, and looking back through 400 issues, it's staggering just how much the magazine has changed over this time. Like *Star Wars*, we've grown up, expanded into other mediums and experienced our share of turbulent times. The years have not always been kind (are they ever?) but going back to our first issue, when we said "Lucas is going to find it difficult to top *Star Wars*", it appears we were right. Lucas has never topped *Star Wars*, but instead he's enlarged it, and over the years that followed, he, and thousands of creative artists, gave us all a childhood to remember and a series that has defied age, to live forever. STARBURST will always hold a special place for *Star Wars* and come issue 800 (by then probably written by droids), it will be exciting to see how much further *Star Wars* has become ingrained in the realms of sci-fi fantasy cinema. May the force be with us all.

STAR WARS: EPISODE VII will open in cinemas on December 18th 2015.



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Photo credit Martin Walker



The 19 year gap between **STAR WARS: EPISODE III - REVENGE OF THE SITH** and **STAR WARS: EPISODE IV - A NEW HOPE** has never before been explored on screen. But all that is about to change as Lucasfilm prepare to introduce the world to a brand new chapter in their timeless space saga....



Set five years before the Battle of Yavin and fourteen years after the creation of the evil Empire, *Star Wars Rebels* will tell the stories of a group who have been brought together by fate and circumstance, all with a shared hate of the Empire and all it stands for. Based on a collection of new characters, audiences will find themselves in a world where the last few remaining Jedi Knights are being hunted down and erased by the Palpatine-led Galactic

Empire. In the face of this dictatorship comes a small faction who look to be the David to the Empire's Goliath. And with this, we will see the start of the rebellion against the corrupt, power-crazed hand of the Empire.

STYLE & SUBSTANCE

Given the success of the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* series, another animated series was always likely to happen at some point. Putting together quite the creative team, *Rebels* is looking to take the fun and excitement of the contemporary *Clone Wars* show but transition the style and vibe to a new series that will be more in tune with George Lucas' 'Holy Trilogy' of *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. To pay homage and work alongside Lucas' iconic trilogy is a big ask, but *Rebels* is making all of the right noises so far.

Firstly, the show has brought Dave Filoni, Simon Kinberg and Greg Weisman on board as executive producers. Filoni was the supervising director on the Emmy-nominated *Clone Wars* since 2008. Weisman worked on fan-favourite animated fares such as *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and *Young Justice*, whilst Kinberg, who has written *Rebels'* premiere episode, has previously worked on *X-Men: First Class* and *Sherlock Holmes* and is currently working with 20th Century Fox on their cinematic *X-Men* and *The Fantastic Four* franchises. (Let's not hold the FF reboot against him, though.) Filoni,

Weisman and Kinberg will also be aided by many of the creative crew who were involved in *The Clone Wars'* six seasons, such as Athena Portillo, Kilian Plunkett, Keith Kellogg and Stewart Lee.

Assisting in the feel of this new show is the work of the sadly-deceased Ralph McQuarrie. Long-time fans will be aware that McQuarrie is responsible for so much of what we have seen in the *Star Wars* world, particularly in George Lucas' initial trilogy. It was largely down to McQuarrie's concept art that 20th Century Fox decided to fund 1977's *Star Wars* movie, with him being the man responsible for the look of key characters and environments, most notably Darth Vader, R2-D2, C-3PO and Chewbacca. *Rebels* is looking to base a lot of its feel and look on the early McQuarrie concept art, and his influence is easily detectable in the appearance of certain characters in this new series.

REBEL YELL

Whilst the events and happenings of *Star Wars Rebels* are as a direct result of the dastardly Empire, there wouldn't really be much of a show if there weren't some hero types looking to fight the machine. And this is where we are introduced to Ezra, Kanan, Zeb, Hera, Sabine, and Chopper.

So much of *Rebels'* story will be told from the viewpoint of Ezra Bridger. Voiced by Taylor Gray, Ezra is a 14-year-old who seems to have a tad of the Luke Skywalker and Han Solo in him. Street-smart and charismatic, the young Ezra doesn't start

Rebels as necessarily part of any particular rebellion. Having to do what he can do to survive, the youngster is out to keep his head above water and to get from day to day. By no means a bad kid, Ezra has no problem with stealing from the Empire, which puts him on their radar. Not the most trusting of characters, this tech-savvy teen will end up being mentored by the older, rough-around-the-edges Kanan. Oh, and maybe, just maybe, young Ezra has some certain abilities which are a little reminiscent of the Force...

One of the central characters of *Rebels* is Kanan Jarrus, voiced by Freddie Prinze Jr. Described as a 'cowboy Jedi', Kanan has been there and done that. Yes, he's a Jedi Knight, but the widespread shockwaves of Order 66 cause him to do whatever he can to keep that fact hidden, essentially forced underground. Secretive and guarded, yet rough and relaxed, Kanan is not what we've come to expect from a Jedi. This Jedi Knight is a cock-sure master of sarcasm. And given that his lightsaber (yes, he has one!) is pretty much in hiding, Kanan is more than happy to unleash his blaster at a moment's notice. This is a character that has seen his world destroyed, seen his friends killed, and as a result has a major axe to grind. Described by Prinze Jr. as a mixture of Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, a lot is expected of the pony-tailed Jedi Knight.

If the character of Zeb Orrelios strikes a familiar chord with you, that would be because his design is heavily based on Ralph McQuarrie's initial design for everyone's favourite Wookiee, Chewbacca. Much like Chewie, Zeb is a no-nonsense character. Voiced by Steve Blum, Zeb

is a member of a new, unknown alien species. The muscle of the rebel group, the character has a bit of a chip on his shoulder. Utilising a physical, military attack style, there's nothing that Zeb loves more than smashing up Stormtroopers. The character of Zeb also has his issues with the young Ezra. Initially not keen on the cocky, young Ezra, Zeb will become almost a big brother-type for Ezra, meaning loads of in-fighting and shoulders to cry on.

Up next in the group of rebels we have Hera Syndulla. The Vanessa Marshall-voiced character is a Twi'lek, much like Saga fave Bib Fortuna. It's said that the strong-willed, warm-hearted Hera is a key character to the dynamic of the rebel group, keeping a sense of perspective, advice and encouragement in a similar way to Leonardo's role in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles group. Most importantly, the practical Hera is the pilot of the Ghost. What's the Ghost, we hear you ask? Well that's the starship that this motley crew call home. Much like Han and Chewie headed up the Millennium Falcon, Hera and Kanan are in control of the Ghost. Similar to the Falcon, the Ghost is a modified Corellian freighter. The Ghost is very much its own ship, but it also shares a similar gun turret. The cockpit will differ, mind, as it's described as like an old-style bomber plane. Still, there's already confirmation that the Ghost will be able to switch to hyperspace.

Joining Hera in representing the females of the *Star Wars* universe is Sabine Wren; a Mandalorian weapons-expert with a penchant for explosives. And not just happy with blowing shit up,

EZRA



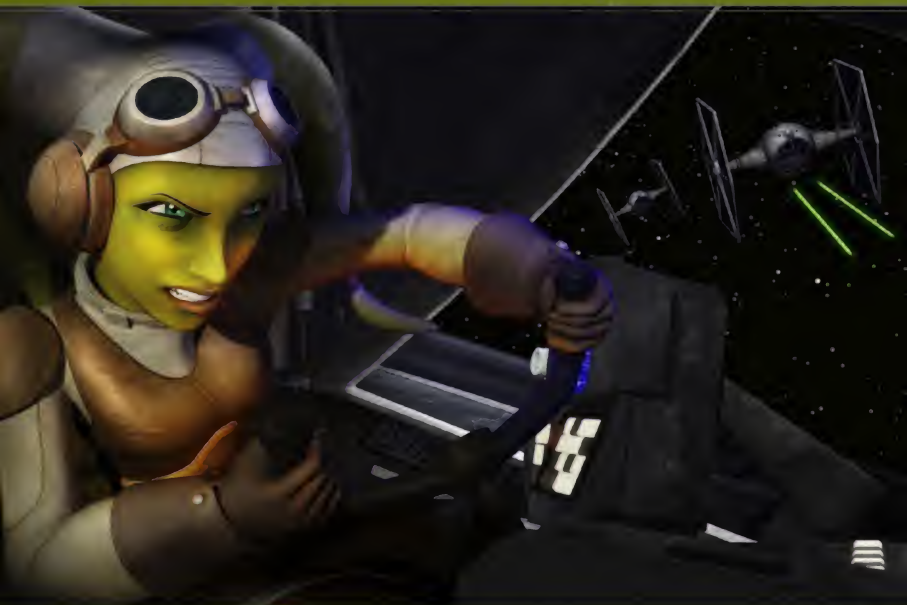
HERA

KANAN

SABINE

CHOPPER





Sabine also has a certain flair and artistry to her. Having been turned against the Empire, the character likes to express her creative side through arson and graffiti. This is someone who likes to stamp their mark on things, particularly if it happens to represent the Empire. Voiced by Tiya Sircar, Hera is quite the tomboy. If you're still not sold on this newcomer, be sure to check out the ever-badass Mandalorian armour that she wears.

Much like the heroes of the original saga were often accompanied by faithful

droids R2-D2 and C-3PO, our band of merry rebels have Chopper, aka C1-10P. Not to be confused with Eric Bana's crazed, moustachioed Australian, Chopper is a mish-mash of a droid. Much like Zeb and Chewie, Chopper is based on McQuarrie's initial concept art for R2-D2. Due to the rebels' plight, Chopper is made up of spare parts. Added to his sketchy appearance, this Astromech droid isn't exactly a people person. Despite being as loyal as they come, Chopper is rude, grumpy and dismissive of people and orders. In the

promo push for *Rebels*, Chopper has been described as a cantankerous cat to R2-D2's family dog!

VILLAINS, VEHICLES & OPTIMISM

As we know, every good story needs a good villain. In *Star Wars Rebels*, much like we get to see a new bunch of heroes, we also get a new big bad. Step forward, The Inquisitor. Of Pau'an descent, The Inquisitor is working under famed-asthmatic Darth Vader and has plenty of numbers at his disposable. Tasked with hunting down the remaining number of the Jedi Order, The Inquisitor has the full powers of the Dark Side at his fingertips. His search will see *Rebels'* reach expand matters to the Outer Rim territories. Key to this is the planet of Lothal.

Poverty-stricken, Lothal initially greets the Empire's presence with open arms on the promise of security and prosperity. Trusting the Empire? Yeah, that won't turn out so well, with Lothal's inhabitants set to be exploited by Imperial forces. Always in need of numbers, the Empire will be recruiting the younger occupants of Lothal to join the TIE Fighter and Stormtrooper academies or to work in the Sienar Fleet Systems factory building TIE Fighters. Safe to say, Lothal will play an important role as *Rebels* progresses.

Away from TIE Fighters, fans will also get to see various other vehicles in *Star Wars*



Rebels, mainly for the bad guys. Imperial forces will get to try out the AT-DP, aka All Terrain Defence Pod, which is a ground-based attack walker that will be based on a 1979 Joe Johnston concept. Handling the AT-TD will be AT-DP pilots that have been designed to look like a cross between *The Empire Strikes Back*'s AT-AT pilots and *Return of the Jedi*'s AT-ST pilots. Then there's the Imperial Troop Transport. Doing exactly what it says on the tin, this vehicle is based on an early Kenner toy from a few decades ago. And rounding things off is Imperial Freighter. This will be a large craft that will include the capacity to transport TIE Fighters, and it's said to be a tweak of a ship thought up for *The Phantom Menace*.

Whereas *The Clone Wars* series had a unique and progressive design, *Star Wars Rebels* will sit right alongside Lucas' original trilogy in terms of look and feel. From the early footage that has been shown, *Rebels* seems to be have a good handle on the balancing act that is drawing inspiration from the original, classic *Star Wars* movies and design whilst still developing new characters and story arcs that can keep things fresh and unique. Added to that, the chance to see the last remaining Jedi being hunted down offers up so much potential. Factor in Jedi Knights having to go incognito and underground, relentlessly searched out by Vader's new right-hand man, and we could have something very special indeed.

Just from the look of *Star Wars Rebels* alone, several generations of fans – particularly those fans of the original trilogy – will have their interest piqued. The look, the colouring, the way it's shot, the static camera movements, the familiar score, characters with slightly similar traits to those of legendary *Star Wars* names of years gone by – it can't help but stimulate the imagination and sense of anticipation in older fans. For the newer fans or those long-timers that found resonance in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, there's still the fluidity and vibrant feel of that show on clear display.

The whole mythology of the *Star Wars* world is immeasurable. For every movie or TV series, there's thousands of comics or novels or videogames. It's a huge world that has been created by so many minds over so many decades. Despite so much to pull on, it's good to see *Rebels* creating a fresh batch of characters that still manage to have enough familiarity to bring in long-time fans. Yes, there was trepidation at the thought of what Disney may do with their Lucasfilm properties, but the early footage and word from *Rebels*, not to mention the show's willingness to pull from other successful parts of previous *Star Wars* projects, has made us sit a little easier with the notion of the House of Mouse running Lucas' famed realm. Whether this is the same with the big screen galaxy far, far away, we'll have to wait and see. For now, at least, we cannot wait for this new animated series to debut later this year. And if you're not looking forward to *Star Wars Rebels* too, quite frankly, we find your lack of faith disturbing.



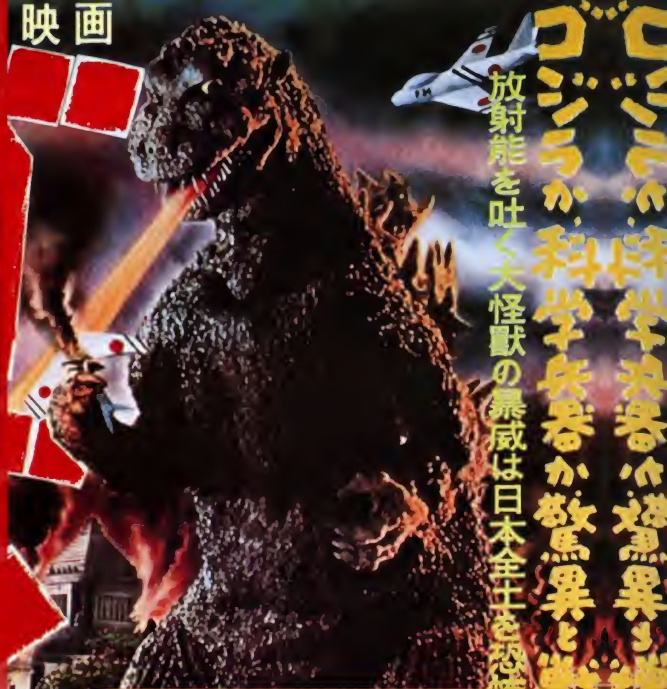
STAR WARS REBELS will debut on Disney XD this September.

EVACUATE TOKYO!

THE GODZILLA STORY

PART 1

by Robin Pierce



With Hollywood's second take on the popular Japanese property about to hit cinemas, we bring you up to speed with our ultimate two-part guide to Godzilla's gargantuan back catalogue...

All over the globe, there are varying means of alerting the population to the possibility or probability of hostile aggression or impending devastation. For example, in America, there's the DEFCON (Defence Condition) system. Over in the Far East, in Japan, a similar system is in use (according to Toho Studios film lore), designed to alert of their own unique threat — Code G.

Alert Level 1: Issued when any scientific, geological, meteorological or psychological evidence except for the physical evidence of G's activity has been confirmed.

Alert Level 2: Issued when G's physical activity, such as voice and movement, has been confirmed.

Alert Level 3: Issued when G has appeared.

Alert Level 4: Issued when G would certainly land on a specific site in Japan. This system is enforced by the authority vested in the National Land Agency: Special Disaster Research Committee.

Of course, it's not a pre-emptive nuclear strike by a hostile country that this system monitors, but yet another strike by

a creature accidentally created by mutation due to nuclear testing. Alert Level 4 means The King of the Monsters, Godzilla, or Gojira in his native Japan, is about to make landfall, and Tokyo is about to suffer destruction of biblical proportions as the mutant lizard seems to have an uncanny homing instinct on not only Tokyo (though that is the city he levels to the ground most often) but also other major Japanese cities. Alert Levels one and two are enough to make the hardiest and most stoic of the Japanese population run for the hills. (Not that they're safe there either.)

Incredibly, this gargantuan force of nature has been terrorising Japan for over sixty years, over a world record 28 movie franchise from Toho Studios. He has appeared in an ill conceived Hollywood blockbuster that failed to actually bust any blocks, a couple of cartoon series, several comic book appearances and a bewildering array of merchandise. He has even advertised Nike sports shoes. He has variously been shown as a death dealing physical metaphor for nuclear radiation



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and its horrendous effects, he has been the defender of Japan against a staggering sub-cast of ever more logic-defying monsters, he has been deemed "the friend of children everywhere" in one breath and has risen again to destroy major densely populated metropolitan areas and their occupants a film or two later.

To examine the *Godzilla* franchise is basically to take a look at Japan's economic resurgence after World War II, and our story begins in 1954.

Gojira was far from the campy, silly, comedic monsterfest seen in the American edits of the films in the sixties and seventies. It was a solemn affair. A sincere horror science fiction film calculated to scare its audience, grim in tone and effective in its execution.

The production took place only nine years after Japan's surrender in 1945 following the devastation of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. American occupation forces had pulled out in 1952 and Japan, though a traumatised nation, was beginning to see the first signs of post-war economic recovery, the physical rebuilding of the country was still very much in evidence. The dark ghosts of World War II and the atomic devices which had brought it to a close were still very evident.

Compounding the national unease was the escalating tension with the Cold War and the detonation of a 15 megaton hydrogen bomb on Bikini Atoll in the central Pacific. This was a weapon of mass destruction reportedly almost one thousand times more powerful than those detonated on the two Japanese cities less than a decade earlier. Bringing matters even closer to home, a 21 man crew Japanese Tuna trawler was in the vicinity and reported seeing the sun rise in the west. The crew were covered with a powdery white substance and were later found to be suffering from radiation poisoning. Fish is a staple of traditional Japanese food, and as a direct consequence of the nuclear testing, radiation tainted

fish entered the food chain before the contamination was discovered.

No wonder then that *Gojira* terrified an audience that was already terrified of the effects of nuclear weaponry and its accompanying lingering companion, the silent killer: radiation.

Tanaka Tomoyuki was a producer at Japan's Toho Studios. Since the war, Toho was struggling to regain its previous dominance in the domestic market. Tomoyuki was inspired by the idea of a sleeping dinosaur being woken by the nuclear bomb testing and attacking Tokyo while on a flight over the Pacific Ocean, disturbed by the headline news of the day and trying to identify the cinematic trends that would put audiences in seats. Japanese audiences had taken a 1952 re-release of the original *King Kong* (1933) to their hearts with such gusto that the film made four times as much as it had on its original release. Ray Harryhausen's *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) which showed a dinosaur woken by atomic testing caused havoc in Manhattan was also captivating audiences. So, taking all the ingredients at the disposal of Tomoyuki's imagination on that flight - big monsters, metropolitan destruction, nuclear testing, contamination and mutation - Japan's biggest movie star war born. Tomoyuki would later expand on this story, explaining: "The theme of the film, from the beginning, was the terror of the bomb. Mankind had created the bomb and now nature was going to take revenge on mankind."

The name "Gojira" is a blending of the words "gorira" meaning gorilla and "kujira" meaning whale, thus alluding to the power and the size of the creature. And while we're on the subject of size, it's worth noting here that the beast's dimensions vary from film to film and sometimes from scene to scene within the same movie. His main power, apart from an appetite for destruction, is the ability to expel a radioactive blast from his mouth. There have been others, such as the capability to exhale the radioactive breath with enough force to propel him backwards, allowing him to fly - but obviously, not to see where he's going. Again, these abilities can change from film to film depending on the creative latitude seized by the scriptwriters and directors. *Godzilla's* gender has never been confirmed, but by and large he's referred to as a male. (We can assume that Minya, the title character in 1967's *Son of Godzilla* was adopted. It's unclear how exactly the "baby" of 1993's *Godzilla vs MechaGodzilla II* came to be.)

Speaking of origins, *Godzilla's* own origin has been told, retold and reinvented several times during the series. Sometimes, he's a several million years old prehistoric creature woken by the nuclear testing, others he's the last of the dinosaurs who was mutated by radiation as a consequence of the testing. Early on in the series, *Godzilla* was the name of a species rather than a name given to just the one. That notion was soon abandoned as it became clear that there was only the single monster being revived over and over for several

films, only to be undone again later in the series. Fair warning: continuity is not a priority in these films and there's no such thing as "canon". The character was often altered to accommodate the changing target audience, leading to several inconsistencies across the series.

The titles of the films in the Toho series are also confusing, as most have been released more than once in different countries under different titles. Where possible, to try and clear things up, you'll find all the English language titles included here with the most common listed first. The *Godzilla* franchise is subdivided into three eras, Showa, Heisei and Shinsei.

THE SHOWA SERIES (1954 - 1975)

(So named because they were filmed during the reign of Hirohito, Japan's Showa emperor.)

Gojira (1954)

Typically for the times, a terrible force is destroying ships out at sea without warning, or seemingly a reason. On Odo Island, an elderly man from a fishing village quotes the legend of *Gojira*, a sea monster whom the villagers used to sacrifice native girls to appease. Seeing this as newsworthy, the media sends some press to the island while the villagers perform a ceremony to keep the fearsome, legendary beast away.

It doesn't go so well. A storm hits the island, along with something else, seen only by a young boy. The next morning, huge footprints are found - radioactive footprints. The natives flee to the hills, but are confronted by *Gojira*/*Godzilla*, a massive 50 metre tall bipedal dinosaur-like creature with three rows of protruding plates running down his back and long tail, and a distinctive ear-splitting roar unlike anything ever heard before.

The costume designers fused the appearances and physical attributes of a T-Rex, stegosaurus and an iguanodon into a suit made of thick layers of latex and urethane foam on a framework of bamboo and wire. The original prototype had to be abandoned because, weighing a hefty 200lbs, it was too heavy and ponderous to be used as called for in the script. Even the much lighter and more pliable second version caused actor Nakajima Haruo some problems. Despite his physical conditioning as a stunt man, he could spend no more than a few minutes at a time encased in the heavy costume, unable to see, breathe, or presumably, hear. The heat of the studio lights compounded his discomfort and technical assistants would regularly empty cups of sweat through a valve in the costume between takes. Haruo himself reportedly lost 20lbs in weight during the shooting of the film.

Godzilla's unmistakable roar, or battle cry, was achieved by drawing a leather glove across the strings of a contrabass. The unearthly noise that resulted was further enhanced in an echo chamber. (Basically the same concept would be used a decade later when a house key was rubbed on a piano wire and the sound was recorded and enhanced to create the eerie TARDIS sound effect for *Doctor Who*.)





An archaeologist discovers that Godzilla has been woken from his centuries of slumber by the nuclear testing, and so the navy are dispatched to kill the monster with depth charges, but this fails and Godzilla next resurfaces in Tokyo Bay, causing widespread death and destruction in his first short attack. A line of electrical towers, 40 metres in height and carrying a lethal charge of 50,000 volts is hastily constructed in case the beast reappears, but when he inevitably does, all that electricity means nothing when the towers and cables are melted away with Godzilla's radioactive breath.

With Tokyo in ruins, there is only one weapon that can save the day – an oxygen destroyer, which is dropped into Tokyo Bay while Godzilla sleeps. The inventor of the ray cuts the air supply to his diving suit in an act of noble self-sacrifice, lest the secrets of his prototype become known and another is created and used to harm mankind. The last shot is of Godzilla dismantling King.

Reaction was mixed, with the film's detractors feeling outraged that the national disaster of nuclear testing in Japan's fishing waters was being exploited for cheap entertainment, but the film was a success. In 1956, director Ishiro Honda's monster on the loose opus was bought by Jewell Enterprises who recut the entire film, dubbed it into English and added several shots of Raymond Burr as an American news reporter on the front line as Godzilla levelled Tokyo. Retitled *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, it became a hit both Stateside, and again in Japan when the Americanised version was released there.

Toho Studios had a major star on their hands, little could they have realised they were at the beginning of an enduring legacy. Unfortunately, they had totally destroyed their rising star, the audience had seen him dissolve like Alka Seltzer.

BUT, as we know, the film industry never let cohesive and logical storytelling get in the way of a healthy profit. A sequel premiered just a shade over six months after the release of *Gojira*.

Godzilla Raids Again (aka *Godzilla's Counterattack*) (1955)

Or, as it was known in America for a while, *Gigantis – the Fire Monster*. Cool name, but making no sense whatsoever. Sadly, the first sequel had all the hallmarks of a rushed cash grab to exploit the success of its predecessor, but nonetheless sold 8.3 million tickets on its first release.

Godzilla may well have been killed off and melted to nothingness by the Oxygen Destroyer, but that didn't mean that at the drop of a hat, Toho couldn't move the goalposts slightly and posit that Godzilla wasn't just a name given to that Tokyo trampling titan of the first film. In the sequel, Godzilla is the name of its species and where there was one, there are more, as discovered by a couple of pilots for a fishing cannery when one of them crash lands on a remote (and presumably previously unexplored) island off the coast of Osaka.

Two prehistoric monsters are battling it out on the island as the crashed pilot and his rescuer witness. One is a Godzilla, the other is an *ankylosaurus*. (A spiky four legged creature named Angurus, though it's never mentioned how it got its name, which is odd considering it hasn't been seen or heard of before!) During their fight, they fall into the sea and eventually come ashore in Osaka where the fight continues, destroying half the city. Angurus is killed by a vicious throat bite by the Godzilla, and the other half of Osaka is destroyed as Godzilla enjoys a victory rampage through what's still left standing.

Returning to the sea, Godzilla is tracked by the military to an island of arctic conditions and in a rousing finale, is buried under several hundred tons of ice and snow after a barrage of missiles is launched.

The creative team would rest the rampaging reptile for seven years, until he made a dramatic return to the screen, in full glorious Technicolor and eye-popping TohoScope for the first time. (Though it wasn't the first Toho Studios monster movie to be filmed in colour, that honour went to *Rodan* in 1956.) Emphasis on horror and metaphor were cast aside as Japanese

audiences thrilled to the awesomely named *Kingu Kongu tai Gojira*. Or, in English...

King Kong vs. Godzilla (1962)

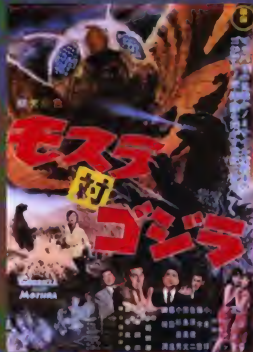
Godzilla breaks out of his icy tomb and destroys a nuclear submarine which managed to get stuck on the iceberg in which he was trapped. Now free and understandably vexed, he moves inland, wiping out an Arctic military base as he goes.

He may be named King Kong and he may be a giant gorilla, but that's pretty much where the similarities with the 1933 film end. There's no explanation to how he survived his fall from the top of the Empire State Building, nor why he's moved his home address from the mysterious Skull Island to Faro Island. Defeating a giant octopus who can somehow move about on land, he is captured and put on a giant raft after falling asleep having drunk too much of the native wine. (If that sounds a little odd, then bear in mind that this is the same film where Japanese explorers are seen cheerfully handing out cigarettes to native island children.) The plan is simple, but not fully thought out – Kong is to be used as a marketing tool for a pharmaceutical company in their advertising.

As Godzilla makes landfall, the authorities ban Kong from the country and order the ship back to Faro Island, but Kong wakes up, and now sober, he swims for Japan and a battle with Godzilla. As a point of trivia, in this film we discover that although Godzilla feeds on radiation, electricity in a high enough dosage repels him. Kong, however feeds on electricity and it makes him stronger.

Despite the authorities' hope that the two monsters destroy each other, following a rumble at Mount Fuji and Tokyo, the struggle carries on in the sea, but it's Kong who surfaces triumphant and swims away to his island home. Maybe audiences forgot that Godzilla had already been established as being able to breathe on both land and underwater.

Light humour had begun to creep in to the stories, and lines like "Kong can't make a



monkey out of us" were inserted. There were also classic unintentional B-movie howlers such as, "We have to evacuate Tokyo – and maybe all of Japan." *King Kong vs. Godzilla* was – and remains – the most successful film of the series with 12.6 million tickets being sold in Japan alone. It consolidated Godzilla as Toho's marquee star, and a new Godzilla film with an increasingly absurd sub-cast of giant monsters would become an annual event for the next twelve years.

While the Godzilla legacy was being formed, Toho was busy creating other potential cinema seat fillers as the kaiju genre of giant monsters on the loose really took hold and gripped the imaginations of audiences not only in Japan, but across the globe, thanks to some hit and miss dubbing. Among these were *Rodan* (1956), a giant pterodactyl whose speed of flight created a destructive shockwave similar to that following an atomic explosion, and *Mothra* (1961) – a majestic, friendly, giant flying moth.

Mothra would be the first in a long line of crossover films that would define the future of the Godzilla franchise, and is an unusual entry in Toho's rolling stock of monster characters. She's the only female monster in their line-up, she's the only monster not to be played by a rubber suited stuntman, rather, she's a large marionette, manipulated on wires. She's also the one with an interesting backstory.

Mothra is a sympathetic creature, misunderstood because of her size. She's also a Goddess, summoned by minuscule twins called The Cosmos, and lives on Infant Island. She is as much a symbol of femininity as she is an allegory of Christianity. (She's gentle, she is sometimes seen as a menacing and destructive larva but then cocoons herself and reappears or resurrects as the angelic flying *Mothra*.)

Godzilla vs. Mothra (aka Godzilla vs. The Thing) (1964)

When a hurricane reveals a giant egg washed up on the Japanese coast, the scientists and

promoters can't see eye to eye who has the best claim to exploit it. A giant incubator is built to hatch it while the argument rages on. The hurricane has done something else... It woke Godzilla. Feeling provoked, Godzilla heads off for Japan once again. Meanwhile, The Cosmos plead for the return of the egg to its rightful place on Infant Island where it originated. They summon the mother to help them, so the now ageing Mothra comes to the rescue but dies defending her egg.

The egg hatches two larvae who spray Godzilla with the cocoon-making substance and he falls to the sea, vanishing to the depths.

Godzilla vs. Mothra would be the last time for several years that Godzilla would be seen as a menacing force of destructive, unreasoning radioactive power. In 1965, Godzilla would become a good guy, the Defender of Earth against an all-new menace, Toho's nastiest creation... King Ghidorah.

Ghidorah: The Three Headed Monster (aka The Biggest Battle on Earth) (1965)

It's hard to believe that in the course of five films, Godzilla had gone a full 180 degrees, from being a grim metaphor for the invisible death sentence of radiation and a sombre reminder of the use of such technology against Japan's population, to the country's legendary defender, assuming the status of a national hero. Gone were the panicked evacuations of main cities as he approached to wreak death and devastation, for the next several films a threat would appear to cast its shadow over the Land of the Rising Sun and Godzilla would rise from the water answering prayers for help like a reptilian deity.

The comedic element was also raised, causing one reviewer at the time to refer to the latest film as "the new *ho-ho* from Toho". Perhaps a more accurate description would have been "the so-so" from Toho. The films were becoming cheesier and sillier, catering to an ever young target audience. Toho were now in the business of making what started as a legitimate horror

character into a child friendly beast. To this end, Godzilla himself was anthropomorphic in his physical appearance. His eyes became larger, his snout shorter, his cranium larger. He lost the fearsome fangs, and the sides of his mouth seemed to be turned up in an almost perpetual half smile. His tail was longer and used for slapstick moments. As the film series progressed, Godzilla would adopt little mannerisms like rubbing his nose, or comically "speaking" to other monsters, this being conveyed to the audience either by the telepathic twin fairies in King Ghidorah, or by speech bubbles as seen in *Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972). Maybe worst of all, the King of the Monsters was seen performing a victory jig having beaten Ghidorah in a fight scene in *Invasion of the Astro Monster* (1965). Carnage was non-existent, and the monster vs monster violence was toned down to the level of WWE-style choreography and theatrics.

Ghidorah, or King Ghidorah as he's often called, is a large three headed flying golden dragon, capable of emitting bolts of energy. Curiously, he has no arms so any hand to hand combat with Godzilla is impossible, as he's either airborne, throwing bolts around, or stomping on her hero literally into the ground.

The bizarre plot has a princess escape an assassination plot by a power hungry member of her cabinet who has placed a bomb aboard her plane. She appears in Japan having lost her memory but claims to be a Martian foretelling disaster. Ghidorah is on his way to Earth, and causes widespread destruction on his arrival. But the newly hatched Mothra has been summoned by The Cosmos and is on her way from Infant Island. She can't handle the ferocious threat alone.

Godzilla and Rodan have awakened out of hibernation and are called upon by Mothra to come and save Japan. The battle takes place on Mount Fuji. Mothra uses the same cocoon web substance to trap Ghidorah as was used to defeat Godzilla himself the previous year, thus allowing the duo to throw Ghidorah in to the sea. As a grateful cast wave their thanks and farewells, the monsters, now evidently a kind of reptilian



and moth version of the Justice League, head off into the sunset.

This was just the beginning...

Invasion of the Astro Monster (aka Monster Zero) (1965)

In the same year, a new planet has moved into our solar system (!?) and two astronauts are sent to investigate (!?!). Its name is Planet X and the strange sunglasses wearing inhabitants explain to the astronauts that their planet is being mercilessly ravaged by a creature they have classified only as Monster Zero. Apparently Monster Zero flew into space looking for something new to pick on after being defeated by our monsters. Yes, Gidorah is back, and the aliens want to borrow Godzilla and Rodan to defeat it so they can live in peace. (Live in peace on a seemingly rogue planet that pretty much bounces around the universe as it likes.) In return, they will give us the cure for cancer.

But there's a plot afoot – the Planet X people have Gidorah secretly under their control and want to use him, Godzilla and Rodan (who are now also under their control), to bring the Earth to its knees. The control is broken, Rodan and Godzilla defeat Gidorah and the humans thwart the aliens.

Ebirah - Horror of the Deep (aka Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster / Big Duel in the North Sea) (1966)

In this weird cross of a surf movie, a Bond film and a monsterfest, 'The Red Bamboo', a SPECTRE-like criminal organisation bent on world domination, operates out of a remote island in the Pacific. The island is defended by Ebirah, essentially a giant lobster. Some crazy sixties kids are accidentally marooned, they meet the natives who are being used as slave labour by The Red Bamboo. Of course, the natives aren't really native to the island, they originate from Infant Island and can summon Mothra for help. Why they haven't done this earlier isn't made clear.

Somewhat, Godzilla is awakened from his slumber with a lightning rod in the same vicinity and deals with Ebirah in a throwdown that includes a long and ever so bizarre fight which features a volleyball-with-boulders sequence that seems to go on forever. Mothra airlifts the "natives" back home and everybody lives happily ever after.

Son of Godzilla (1967)

A team of U.N. scientists are conducting weather experiments in a bid to produce more food for the world's increasing population. Instead, all they produce is giant plants, giant mantises and a giant spider. Godzilla is also on the island with his inexplicable newly hatched offspring if the title is believed. In the absence of a female Godzilla to lay the egg... who can tell? Anyhow, the film is the light-hearted tale of the baby (later named Minya and in some films, Minilla) and his misadventures, and the efforts of Godzilla to defend him from the mutated bugs. The scientists eventually lower the temperature of the island to the degree that there's a snowfall, killing off the bugs and sending poor Godzilla and Minya into enforced hibernation.

Destroy All Monsters (aka Attack of the Marching Monsters) (1968)

This was Toho's twentieth kaiju film overall, and the studio had decided to bid farewell to their star in an epic, monster studied finale which would feature their entire stable of characters.

All of Toho's monsters are now kept confined to Monster Island where they live as peaceably as they can. But soon, they start attacking the major cities of the world. Godzilla pays his first visit to New York, Mothra attacks Beijing, Rodan lays waste to Moscow. But the monsters aren't to blame. Yep, it's actually more monster-controlling aliens, this time the Kilaaks.

As the United Nations Space Committee locate the source of the signal used to control the monsters and destroy it, the Kilaaks have one more weapon of mass destruction to unleash... King Gidorah.

The monsters overpower Gidorah again, and the Kilaaks have yet another fire breathing dragon, but this one's a disguised spaceship. Earth wins, the monsters are taken back to idle their days on Monster Island.

That would've been that, except *Destroy All Monsters* made more money than expected. But rather than investing heavily in the continuation of the series, Toho instead went the other way and presented fans with the strangest and weakest film in the series...

Godzilla's Revenge (aka All Monsters Attack) (1969)

This has to be seen to be believed. A schoolboy, picked on by a bully, imagines himself on Monster Island where he meets Minya. Flashback footage of scenes from earlier films and his dreams of observing Minya receiving life lessons from Godzilla (dealing with a bully (in this case, a monster called Gabera) shows the child how to deal with his problems. (After all, this was the point where Godzilla was "the friend of children everywhere" – except presumably those he torched with his radioactive blast back in his first film.)

The world was changing, and a cause for concern across the globe was the mounting problem of pollution. Saving our ecology was the message and Godzilla was at the forefront of it when he returned to the screen two years later in...

Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster (aka Godzilla vs. Hedorah) (1971)

As Godzilla had been the personification of the evils of nuclear testing, so Hedorah personified pollution, being a creature of sludge, burning people with its acid and of course a death ray. After a skirmish that leaves our hero beaten, he gets his rematch and wins the day, saving humanity once again in a film that's a better and more concerted effort than its predecessor – but still a bit lacklustre.

Godzilla vs. Gigan (aka Godzilla on Monster Island) (1972)

Godzilla's allure was wearing thin, the budgets were diminishing and so was the imaginative streak that made even the silliest

of the monsters somehow compelling. *Godzilla vs. Gigan*'s plot is repetitive and derivative. A cartoonist is hired to design a new attraction for Tokyo's newest theme park World Children's Land. They are, of course, aliens disguised as humans but who really look like cockroaches. They awake Godzilla and Angurisu. To make things interesting, they also unleash King Ghidorah and Gigan, who makes his debut. Gigan is a cybernetic space monster with a buzz saw in his belly and steel hooks for hands. He looks freakishly strange, but is notable for being the first opponent to make Godzilla bleed on screen!

Godzilla vs. Megalon (1973)

Seatopia is where the survivors of the lost empire of Mu live, and they're fed up of us surface dwellers detonating our darned nuclear devices, so they unleash Megalon on us to teach us a lesson. Megalon is perhaps the strangest looking beast yet. Imagine a giant bipedal beetle with massive drill bits for hands, which it can use to drill through just about anything, AND he can shoot death rays through them. Stupid as he sounds, he still needs help to battle Godzilla, so Gigan makes his return. Helping the big guy out is Jet Jaguar – a human sized robot programmed to grow to giant size, fly and think for itself. In appearance, he's a bit like an early *Power Ranger*. If he sounds a little juvenile, bear in mind his creator was an elementary school student who entered his creation in a contest run by the filmmakers, the prize being that the winning entry would appear in a *Godzilla* movie.

Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla (aka Godzilla vs. The Cosmic Monster) (1974)

In an interesting start, *Godzilla* seems to have returned to his vicious destructive earlier self, wrecking an oil refinery and suckerpunching his ally Angurisu. However, another *Godzilla* arrives and as they fight, we see the first one is a 1:1 scale robot replica of *Godzilla* (the surprise element is kind of spoiled by the title) and he is built of the toughest material in all the cosmos – space titanium. At one point, *Godzilla* is seemingly killed, but revived by lightning and assisted by an ancient Okinawan lion god King Caesar (who looks like a huge angry bipedal kitten) for the win.

Terror of Mechagodzilla (1975)

The same aliens (from, intriguingly, the Third Planet of the Black Hole in Space) who built Mechagodzilla return for a second go-around. Mechagodzilla has been rebuilt and there's a prehistoric sea monster called Titanosaurus (another creation born from a school contest) thrown into the brawl. Toho were out of steam and ideas, *Godzilla* had come to the end of his first run and took a well deserved ten year sabbatical.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Legendary Pictures and director Gareth Edwards will unveil their vision of *GODZILLA* when it opens in UK cinemas May 15th.



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



Who Goes Horror?

In his fifty years on television the Doctor has cropped up in some remarkable and weird places: the irradiated Dalek planet Skaro, the rock-strewn surface of Vortis with its population of talking butterflies and wardrobe-like giant ant Zarbi, the jungle world of Spiridon, an impossible planet orbiting a black hole, the ice planet of the Ood and even Cardiff. But this month sees the TARDIS pitching up in one of its most unusual locations as a selection of classic Doctor Who adventures arrives on... the Horror Channel.

The series might seem like an unlikely bedfellow for the Horror Channel whose typical diet includes interesting movies like *Squal* and *Zombie Women of Satan*. But on closer inspection their schedule often includes material which stretches the definition of 'horror' to breaking point, from TV genre classics like *The Invaders* and... er... *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman* (which is actually horrific for all sorts of reasons) to intriguing titles such as the 1972 feature film TV spin-off *Doomwatch* and creaky but fun 1960s *Fu Manchu* movies. And of course 'classic' Doctor Who was legendary for sending its younger viewers scuttling behind the sofa with its sometimes edgy teatime terrors. As the Horror Channel's Director of Programming, Alina Florea, explains: "Doctor Who is an iconic series and we are proud and excited to welcome this giant of British television to our channel. The line-up will include some of the most revered from seven classic Doctors – stories that terrified, thrilled and captured

the imagination of children and adults through the decades. Doctor Who joins a long line of well-loved classic series we have endeavoured to showcase on Horror Channel over the last few years."

The Horror Channel have secured the rights to screen thirty 'classic' Doctor Who yarns starting with the very first four-part serial starring William Hartnell from 1963 with the Easter weekend 'marathon' of one story from each of the first seven incarnations of the Doctor followed by weekday chronological double-bills screened during the day and early evening. Stories featured will include *The Mind Robber*, *The Daemons*, *Genesis of the Daleks*, *Caves of Androzani*, *Attack of the Cybermen* and *The Curse of Fenric*.

Series 8

With production on the eighth new season of Doctor Who proceeding apace at BBC Wales' Roath Lock Studios in Cardiff and on location across South Wales, more news is filtering in confirming guest stars appearing alongside new Doctor Peter Capaldi in forthcoming episodes. Actress Keeley Hawes, best known from her roles as Zoe Reynolds in BBC spy drama *Spooks*, Alex Drake in *Life on Mars* follow-up *Ashes to Ashes* and more recently as DI Lindsay Denton in the second series of BBC2's brilliant *Line of Duty*, will play Ms Delphox, described as a "villainous banker" in the fifth episode of the new series, written by Stephen Thompson and directed by Douglas Mackinnon. Meanwhile Tom Riley, currently starring as Leonardo da Vinci in the second series of

the big-budget Starz/BBC Worldwide fruity fantasy drama *Da Vinci's Demons*, is joining the cast of an episode written by regular Who scribe Mark Gatiss who recently revealed that he will provide two scripts for the upcoming season. The episode is rumoured to be entitled *Robots of Sherwood* and the cast also includes actor Ian Hallard (previously seen as 1960s Doctor Who director Richard Martin in last year's docudrama *An Adventure in Space and Time*) who will be playing a character named 'Alan a'Dale'. The episode will be directed by Paul Murphy who will also helm the sixth episode in the season, written by Gareth (Shakespeare Code, *The Lodger*, *Closing Time*) Roberts.

Adric's Back!

Big Finish, purveyors of officially licensed full cast audios featuring the stars of 'classic' Doctor Who are rightly proud of casting coups which have secured the talents of Eighth Doctor Paul McGann for a run of all-new audio adventures and also Doctor Who legend Tom Baker. Baker, who portrayed the Fourth Doctor between 1974 and 1981, finally, after years of resistance, entered the fold a couple of years ago to delight his generations of fans by returning to the role of the Doctor for ongoing adventures. But Big Finish have finally secured their own Holy Grail... Adric's back! Played on TV from 1981 to 1982 by inexperienced actor Matthew Waterhouse, boy biffin Adric joined Baker and his successor Peter Davison aboard the TARDIS and his presence was endured between gritted teeth by many contemporary fans. But Waterhouse is now back, rejoining his co-stars Peter Davison, Sarah Sutton (Nyssa) and Tegan (Janet Fielding) in a special five-CD boxset which will include two brand new four-part adventures and a bonus disc which includes a special documentary and cast interviews. The Fifth Doctor Boxset – including the adventures *Psychodrome* and *Iterations of I* – will be available in August.

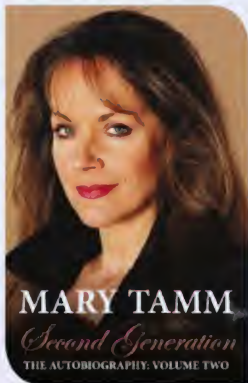


Doctor Who at the BAFTA Craft Awards

It may not be a high profile red carpet event but the BAFTA Craft Awards, which honour the behind-the-scenes professionals involved in TV production, has recognised a number of Doctor Who-related productions in this year's nominations list. The fiftieth anniversary episode Day of the Doctor has been nominated in the 'Special, Visual and Graphics Effects' category whilst Mark Gatiss' Doctor Who origins drama An Adventure in Space and Time is nominated in three categories - 'Costume Design', 'Make-Up and Hair Design' and 'Editing - Fiction'. 2013's Doctor Who Proms concert, screened on BBC1 last August, appears in the 'Entertainment Craft Team' category. The winners will be announced on Sunday 27th April and Outside the Box will report on the results next month.

Book News

Mary Tamm, who portrayed the first incarnation of the Doctor's Time Lord travelling companion Romana throughout the 26-episode 1978 'Key to Time' season of Doctor Who, passed away in July 2012. First Generation, the first volume of her autobiography which covered her early life and concluded halfway through her time on Doctor Who, was published in 2009. A follow-up volume, Second Generation, completed prior to her death, continues her recollections of her time on Doctor Who and her life and career after leaving the show and is published this month by Fantom Publishing who comment: "Packed with incidents and anecdotes recounted with Mary's trademark no-nonsense Northern wit, Second Generation is rounded out with tributes and reflections from some of her closest friends and colleagues, including Miriam Margolyes, Carol Royle and Steven Berkoff."



Obituaries

Exotic actress Kate O'Mara, best known to Doctor Who fans for her role as psychopathic rogue Time Lord chemist The Rani in two serials in the 1980s and a charity special in 1993, died on 30th March at the age of 74 following a short illness. Leicester-born Kate first took to the stage in 1963 and appeared regularly on iconic TV series such as The Avengers, The Saint, Z Cars and Danger Man and featured in two 1970 Hammer horror films, The Vampire Lovers and The Horror of Frankenstein. In the 1970s she appeared in the BBC drama The Brothers (alongside future Doctor Colin Baker) and infamous early-evening BBC seaborne soap opera Triangle. In 1986, in between her first two appearances as The Rani in Doctor Who, she joined Joan Collins in glamorous Primetime American drama Dynasty where she played the role of the wonderfully named Caress Morell. In later years she appeared occasionally in TV shows such as Bad Girls and Absolutely Fabulous and was still appearing regularly in theatre productions all over the UK. As recently as last year Kate, whose first husband was actor Jeremy Young, remembered by Doctor Who fans from his role as caveman Kal in the very first serial in 1963 and later as astronaut Gordon Lowery in Mission to the Unknown in 1965, was still keen to see the Rani return to confound the Doctor in future television adventures.

Meanwhile, Derek Martinus, who directed many episodes of Doctor Who in the 1960s as well as Jon Pertwee's debut serial Spearhead from Space, died on 27th March from complications arising from Alzheimer's disease. Ilford born Derek was educated in Essex before moving to America where he studied at the University of Oklahoma and the Yale School of Drama, returning to the UK in the mid-1950s. Theatre directing led to employment at the BBC where his Doctor Who credits included William Hartnell's final serial The Tenth Planet and classic Patrick Troughton stories Evil of the Daleks and The Ice Warriors. Although he last worked on Doctor Who in 1970 he continued directing for the BBC and later credits would include episodes of BBC space opera Blake's 7, dozens of episodes of cop drama Z Cars and productions for Swedish television and theatre. Derek is survived by his wife Elvina, two daughters and three grandchildren. His daughter Charlotta, herself a BBC documentary maker, said of her father: "He was a legend, just an absolute legend. He taught me how to love, live and laugh, he was just such an amazing man. It was an amazing childhood to be living among the Doctor Who paraphernalia. We used to go down and watch Doctor Who being made and see the Daleks, and even get inside the Daleks... He was really inspirational for me and my sister Pia who is a doctor. He was a leader of men and he inspired everyone."

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



When Tom Baker finally relinquished the role of the Doctor in the spring of 1981, not only did he leave a gaping hole in the programme that any actor would have found difficult to fill, but he also left the series at the beginning of a period of massive change. Not just in the ongoing fiction of *Doctor Who*, but also a change in the way people watched the programme. The 1980s was a period of incredible turbulence for the series, and looking back it's difficult not to see the seeds of its eventual demise being sown as early as Seasons 18 and 19 – and no surprise to find it floundering by the end of the decade.

Peter Davison was ostensibly a very odd choice to play the Fifth Doctor, a younger, more *straightforward* actor, and not someone you'd automatically think of now when casting for the role of a centuries-old alien. Decades later, even David Tennant and Matt Smith played the Doctor more as a character part than as a clear-cut leading man, and when you look at the characters Davison was most identified

with in 1980, you can perhaps see what producer John Nathan-Turner was thinking when the actor was employed. Nevertheless, Davison's Doctor quickly became the most uncomplicated reading of the role, the most unambiguously heroic, and often at odds with the stories in which he was appearing. The *Doctor Who* of Season 19 is probably the series at its strangest and least consistent, and when we consider the reasons, we can easily see why Davison made a success of the part in the short-term (in spite of the natural resistance to such a huge change that some fans must have felt at the time), and why the series was setting a course for self-destruction in the not-too-distant future.

There was a new kind of hand on the tiller. There was also a new kind of course to navigate. And the two things together ultimately spelt disaster. Because prior to John Nathan-Turner's appointment as producer of the show, *Doctor Who* had always had someone with a very strong storytelling background behind it, either a talented script editor or a producer

with writing experience – or both. JNT's lack of writing nous wouldn't have been a problem had he found a second-in-command who was strong in that department, but for the first few years of the decade that didn't really happen. Season 18 was overseen by Christopher H. Bidmead, who although he had written a few episodes of a couple of series for Thames back in the mid-1970s, was really better known as a science journalist by the time of his appointment. Bidmead stayed a year and after he went, *Doctor Who* was left without a script editor at all for the majority of Peter Davison's first year, before Eric Saward (himself with even more limited professional writing experience) started to get his teeth into the job during Season 20.

The result was that a series that had thrived on telling relatively simple good-versus-evil stories, albeit often with layers of sub-text or sub-plot to back them up, found itself entering a new decade on the back of overly convoluted plots and ambiguously motivated

narratives. Audiences at home would have been hard-pressed to understand what stories like *Meglos*, *Castrovalva* and *Mawdryn Undead* were really about, let alone *Warriors' Gate* and *Kinda*. Which is not to say that these stories were without merit, of course; they were simply a new kind of *Doctor Who* and one that the Saturday evening audiences of the 1960s and 1970s might well have found obscure and off-putting.

Were it not for two things.

The first was the series' move to a twice-weekly midweek slot. In and of itself, this might have been seen as a demotion and the beginning of the BBC's dissatisfaction with the programme – the beginning of the end. But actually the move was probably responsible for saving a show that was becoming stale and unpopular in its natural home; something that audiences no longer looked forward to, but took for granted. However, on a Monday or a Tuesday evening following the news programmes, and at the beginning of an evening's entertainment, it was easy to forgive *Doctor Who*'s flaws (the rather unappetising regular companion characters and the increasingly obvious cheapness of the sets, as well as the opaque storylines) and view it simply as something odd and impenetrable to navigate before the more standard evening's fare came along half an hour later. For once, the series was being watched by a greater number of adults who remembered it from their childhoods – and thus were willing to overlook its problems, perhaps assuming its incomprehensibility was something that had always been there – than it was by the children who had been its mainstay for nearly two decades.

The other thing that saved *Doctor Who* was of course Peter Davison. Already a popular actor (and the closest thing the series had come to having a household name as its star), it was the very quality that hardened fans would have considered "blandness" that endeared Davison to a non-science



fiction-loving audience. The eccentricity or inscrutability of a William Hartnell or even a Tom Baker might not have played so well while the evening meal was being digested, but Davison's charm and approachability ensured that even if viewers couldn't understand the plots, they could still root for the hero.

Peter Davison himself was far from satisfied with the material he was being given, though. In a period in which a story like *Earthshock* could follow *Black Orchid* (and itself be followed by *Time-Flight*), it's little wonder that the actor found the scripts rather bewildering. With the recording sessions involving mostly out-of-sequence shooting (something that the first two Doctors had never had to deal with), Davison quickly came up with a coping mechanism; rather frustratingly for viewers paying close attention, the actor would play every scene in a rather breathless manner (the actor reasoning that the character would always be either exasperated or have just finished running

from somewhere), giving the feeling of a Doctor who had inherited asthmatic lungs. Nevertheless, for casual viewers the impression given was less of a Doctor who would smugly take charge of any situation in which he might find himself, and instead of one who was always on the verge of a defeat from which he would rather modestly snatch victory at the last minute. Moments like *Warriors of the Deep*'s "There should have been another way" simply compounded this thought.

But Peter Davison didn't stay long with *Doctor Who*, relinquishing the role after his initial three-year contract was up. The tedium of Season 20 (the actor's *Terminus*, shall we say) had convinced him not to extend, and it was only Robert Holmes' sublime scripts for *The Caves of Androzani*, Davison's swansong, that might have given him pause to regret the decision.

We all know what happened next: Colin Baker's flawed and overconfident Sixth Doctor (the polar opposite of the Doctor who had effectively saved the show) met Eric Seward's overconfident and adolescent post-*Androzani* new grittiness (in a period of the series that sought to emulate post-watershed cop dramas like *The Sweeney* rather than the sci-fi and horror movies of yore), and the writing was on the wall. A return to Saturday nights might have seen viewing figures initially holding firm, but audiences weren't persuaded and after an 18-month hiatus didn't return in such numbers to see where *Doctor Who* was going next. A further three series and a new lease of life might have beckoned, but precious few were still interested enough to see them.

But for three years at the start of the decade, Peter Davison was the still centre of an unpredictable universe, and his was the last fate that mainstream audiences would think of as part of the golden era of *Doctor Who*.

ART: SIMON BRETT





SANDS OF TIME

AUTHOR: JUSTIN RICHARDS
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Justin Richards' contribution to the BBC's Monster Collection is the Fifth Doctor story *Sands of Time*. Originally published in 1996, this is a complex time-twisting story that follows on from the Fourth Doctor TV adventure *Pramids of Mars*.

As Justin explains in the introduction, this story was constructed around a single mystery and all the ramifications that follow. Nyssa is kidnapped and it is up to the Doctor and Tegan to scour thousands of years of Egyptian history as they try to rescue her without allowing the Osiran menace of Nephthys to gain power.

The story is told out of order and with the Doctor's own timeline twisted around in a way that is initially hard to follow. However, the pieces are brought together in the end with plenty of signposting. Along the way, there is a lot of backstory and Egyptology which eventually becomes a bit repetitive. That said, the last third of the book is the strongest – having set up all the characters and twists, the action is well-paced and enjoyable. The book's main weakness is also its strength in that the removal of Nyssa early on keeps her almost entirely off-stage.

The resolution also pivots on one too many unexplained coincidences, but it needs a critical eye to notice.

A definite plus is the presence of Atkins the butler, who travels in time with the Doctor and Tegan; a well-crafted character, more so than Tegan herself, who is in places perfunctory. Overall, a good story that does cover an alien menace that hasn't been overused – the setting dominates in places but the book is still a decent read.

TONY JONES

+++++++ 7



SCALES OF INJUSTICE

AUTHOR: GARY RUSSELL
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

comic relief, will most likely be utterly bewildered by this dense, dark, continuity heavy title from 1996, reprinted as part of the BBC's new 'Monster Collection' novel series. Not only is the family-friendly 'new' Silurian on the cover of this reprint hugely anachronistic, it's also misleading. Readers expecting a cheery twenty-first century style Silurian romp will find themselves confronted with brutal violence, light swearing, a tortuously complex narrative worlds away from the fast-paced sophistication of modern *Who* – and many may wonder why the BBC felt that the title is a suitable addition to a range so clearly aimed at the younger demographic who have grown accustomed to a lighter tone since the series returned in 2005.

In his all-new introduction, writer Russell (who would go on to script edit the TV series in the 21st century) professes his love for Jon Pertwee's 1970 debut season. And whilst

Russell's characterisations of the show's leads – the Doctor, assistant Liz Shaw and the Brigadier – are decent enough, the story itself barely resembles the era its author is so keen to recreate. The Doctor is largely peripheral to the action – which ultimately is the familiar 'Silurians wake and want their world back' common to all their televised appearances – whilst the Brigadier is portrayed as a man whose devotion to duty is putting his marriage at risk and Liz Shaw is a pipe-smoking (?) boffin frustrated by being the Doctor's straight-woman.

Russell is far more concerned with his own creations – secret Governmental departments, shady conspiracies and mysterious assassins – and pages and indeed entire chapters (the book being split into seven distinct 'episodes' to mirror the style of much of the 1970 TV season) pass by in a blur of talking heads yakking at one another and singularly

failing to allow the story to develop much in the way of momentum. Scales of Injustice creaks under the weight of its continuity references and whilst older fans may admire Russell's enthusiastic (and often quite ingenious) attempts to weave together countless threads from the series' long canon, casual readers are likely to quickly find themselves adrift in the backwaters of a story which bogs itself down in far too much self-satisfied box-ticking at the expense of any decent action and genuine narrative invention.

Scales of Injustice isn't a bad book but it's clearly a relic from a thankfully bygone age of Doctor *Who* fiction, lacking the sprightly pace of the more accessible novels published by BBC books since 2005. Newbies to the series are advised to approach with extreme caution.

PAUL MOUNT

+++++++ 5



TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

AUTHOR: JONATHAN MORRIS
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In *Touched by an Angel*, the Weeping Angels get a rare outing in something that Steven Moffat hasn't written. What's great about this is that it gives Morris the chance to bring some fresh ideas to the table, such as the Angels' new abilities.

Mark Whitaker, the main character, acts like many of us would do if we were ever in the same situation. He gets sent back in time to the '90s and has to live his way back. We do have to take issue with the Doctor's claim that Mark's situation is unique. In Blink,

the Angels sent back someone who was around for his younger self's lifetime.

Morris has written about the last few decades with the kind of detail that makes us relive them. So much so, in fact, that it's like having the '90s walk up and punch you in the face. The writing will also remind older readers of how they felt when they were young and a bit of an oblivious idiot like Whitaker. Younger readers might experience a touch of pain at reading this in a post-Angels Take Manhattan world.

The only failing of the

book is the almost inevitable turn that the narrative takes towards the end. It plays out in a way that genre-savvy readers have seen a thousand times before. Indeed, it's not a million miles away from *Doctor Who's* own *Father's Day* and *The Fires of Pompeii*. Having said that, if you can get past that (and it's possible), you'll enjoy the book. We definitely did.

ALISTER DAVIDSON

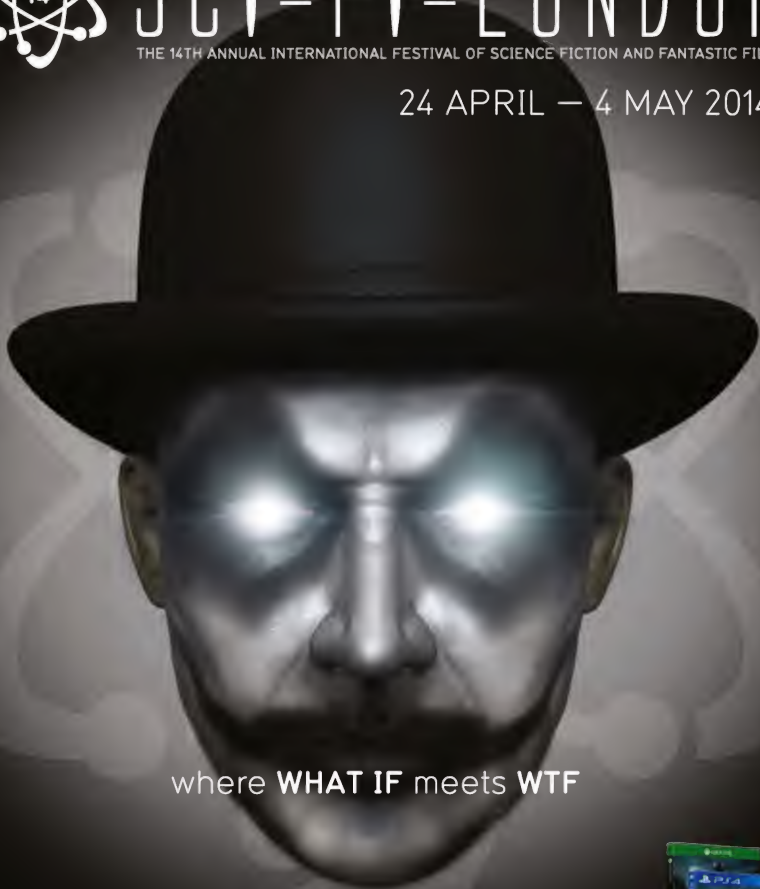
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CAROLINE PREECE

The Girl From

PLANET



In the latest golden age of television, with our *Sleepy Hollows* and our *Walking Dead*s, it's tempting to think that the notion of 'guilty pleasure TV' is an outdated concept – a relic from a time when ninety per cent of the box's output was trash we had to sift through to get to the good stuff. Not so. The CW's *Reign* (yet to find a home in the UK) is almost the definition of 'guilty pleasure', with its hugely anachronistic costumes, liberties taken with historical fact and determination to make Mary Queen of Scots' life into a primetime soap opera. But it's also one of the most entertaining and inventive new shows of the season.

American TV network The CW, as you might have read in this column a thousand times, is home to shows that range from the ridiculous to the sublime, with *The Vampire Diaries*, *Arrow*, *The Tomorrow People*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Supernatural*, *Star-Crossed* and *The 100* currently making it a contender for most genre shows on a single network. But aside from the breakout success of *Arrow*, the general viewer tends to dismiss the channel's output entirely, primarily due to its reputation for love triangles, shirtless men and a casting ban on anyone over 35. And *Reign* looked like the worst offender of all – adapting history into their own brand of soapy high school fun and turning a lot of noses up in the process.

Starting as it meant to go on, *Reign*

began with a naive young Mary arriving at French court after growing up in a convent, being reunited with her betrothed prince, Francis, and meeting the completely invented bastard brother, Bash, soon after. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the love triangle that has so far fuelled so many of the show's plot turns but, after the success of so many other fantasy romances on television, *Reign* was never going to be content sticking with mere history. No, it also has prophecies and ghosts and witchcraft – this is the kind of show where Nostradamus is a hunky part of the furniture – and throws it all at its unsuspecting audience with the gusto and delight that other shows could stand to learn from.

Self-described (rather accurately) as *Game of Thrones* meets *Gossip Girl*, the show deserves initial credit for never trying to be something it isn't. It'll never be *Game of Thrones*, of course, but it isn't trying to be. It's batshit crazy telly at its very best – unabashedly entertaining its core audience and weaving in those elements that have been successful over the last five years or so. This includes magic and prophecy, which have formed a huge part of period dramas of late – from *Merlin* and *Game of Thrones* to *The White Queen* – and *Reign* just might be the most inventive YA romance to come out of any medium in years. Even better, despite how the show has been sold to the typical

CW audience (aka teenage girls), the love triangle is the least interesting bit.

Adelaide Kane, who portrays our heroine, really is wonderful, and deserves to be the next breakout star of the network. Stuck with a role that could be horribly passive in anyone else's hands, she adds willpower and determination to Mary that immediately elevates the show to a quality it arguably shouldn't reach. She is undoubtedly the best thing about the show, but it's the uniquely mad storytelling style that audiences will stay for. Like *Teen Wolf* and *Sleepy Hollow* before it, *Reign* transcends its soapy origins and unambitious intentions by simply never letting the audience relax. There might be a lot of gazing into each other's eyes and out at beautiful landscapes, but it's done amidst bloodshed and war on all sides.

16th century French court is a glaringly obvious setting for this kind of fantasy period piece, of course, with rampant superstition and spooky dark corridors inherent to the time only adding to the atmosphere. We saw the same thing with the recent BBC/Starz co-production, *The White Queen*, which had the similar idea of combining agreed history with magic and psychic quests. Putting them side by side, it's entirely possible that both shows could exist in the same universe and, if the rumours of a *White Queen* follow-up turn out to be true, then I'm starting the petition for a crossover.

History vs. Entertainment: In Defence of The CW's REIGN

Is it an outright bastardisation for shows like *Reign* and *The White Queen* to insert fantastical elements into recorded events, deaths and coronations? That really depends on who you ask but, for fans of genre television, it's clear that this combination can be golden. The BBC's take on Philippa Gregory's novels received a mixed reaction from everyone but, inaccuracies aside, *Reign* is a very different beast. There's knowingness to the liberties it takes, for one, as demonstrated by the modern pop music, wildly inappropriate costumes and general disregard for the criticisms that have been thrown at it since the project was announced.

And you can't really talk about *Reign* without first taking into account the widespread success of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Set in a fantasy world based heavily on real events, rivalries and other ludicrous goings on taken from the history books, it has the freedom to do pretty much what it likes without the judgemental glares from history buffs and the like. This is a leniency that *Reign* doesn't enjoy, but appears to disregard nonetheless, making it a much more enjoyable experience without the notion that it has to adhere to the facts of Mary Stuart's life. It doesn't matter if Bash didn't exist – he's necessary to provide the obligatory love triangle – and this attitude gives *Reign* much of its distinctive character.

It's fanfiction, as many have dubbed it, and is best enjoyed with the same suspended disbelief as something like *A Knight's Tale* or the most recent *Musketeers* series. Truth be told, it doesn't seem to have time for such trifles as who Mary really married or whether Francis is going to die at age sixteen – it's too busy with its gleefully



drawn ghosts, pagans and other mysterious happenings in the surrounding woods to the glorious looking castles and courtyards. It's pulpy and campy, furiously going through events like there's no tomorrow despite an early second season renewal from the CW. Whether it can keep up the pacing across multiple seasons remains to be seen, but it hardly matters with a first season so confident and enjoyable.

Bottom line – *Reign* is a good show that I believe, if it were a teen drama set in modern times, would be far more popular with audiences and critics. That's a shame as, although there are series that need to stick to the history books in order to maintain their po-faced earnestness, *Reign* is not one of them. From the first sequence of nuns choking over their poisoned porridge, Mary arriving at court to the sound of The Lumineers and illicit kissing with illegitimate brothers who never existed in the first place, it's obvious that this isn't going to be one for history students to swot up with before their exams.

But that isn't what this kind of television is about and, with enough other-worldly intrigue to keep even fantasy fans happy, no one should feel guilty about enjoying such a brazenly entertaining ride through the possible shenanigans of 16th century royals. *Reign* has the potential to become one of those shows that doesn't quite catch on until its second or third season once viewers have forgotten about the initial disdain it was greeted with and caught up on a friend's recommendation. It may take

dramatic license to a whole new level but, after a couple of episodes, you may find yourself having too much fun to care.

I may be the ultimate CW apologist, at least sampling every cockamamie idea they come out with each year, but *Reign* has been a genuinely pleasant surprise that deserves to overcome the slightly undeserved onslaught of abuse and dismissal it got before the pilot had even aired. For fans of the network's general output, there are plenty of pretty young people in pretty (wholly inaccurate to a hilarious level) dresses, racy storylines and romantic tension but, for genre fans and telly addicts in general, there's plenty of political debate, ominous ever-changing prophecies and – somewhat surprisingly – some pretty gruesome violence and gore.

It's arguably one of the best coming of age stories currently on the air and, despite the initial negative reaction, is also darn fine entertainment. There's a solid argument that accuracy and entertainment shouldn't be mutually exclusive, of course, but, if *Reign* hadn't gone down its own peculiar path, then I wouldn't be able to talk about it in a magazine like *STARBURST*. Of all the new shows to come out of the US in the 2013-14 season, *Sleepy Hollow* has received the most praise for its fast-paced, inventive storytelling and compelling characters – historical or not – but, for those who want more of the same madness in its absence, or those whose taste skews a little younger and more female, *Reign* is definitely worth a look.



BEWARE THE BAT-FAN!

BY NICK SPACEK



YOU KNOW RALPH GARMAN, EVEN IF YOU THINK YOU DON'T. WHILE HE'S BEEN A MAINSTAY ON LOS ANGELES' RADIO STATION KROQ'S KEVIN AND BEAN MORNING SHOW FOR YEARS, UK FANS LIKELY KNOW HIM BEST AS THE HOST OF THE REALITY TV SHOW PARODY THE JOE SCHMO SHOW AND CO-HOST OF THE WILDLY-POPULAR PODCAST HOLLYWOOD BABBLE-ON WITH DIRECTOR KEVIN SMITH. IT'S THAT PARTNERSHIP WITH SMITH THAT'S LED TO GARMAN'S LATEST GIG, WHICH IS CO-WRITING A CROSSOVER SERIES BETWEEN DYNAMITE ENTERTAINMENT'S GREEN HORNET AND DC'S BATMAN '66 COMICS. IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH GARMAN FOR UK FANS, WE'LL ALSO SOON GET OUR FIRST CHANCE TO SEE HOLLYWOOD BABBLE-ON OUTSIDE OF NORTH AMERICA WHEN IT HITS OUR SHORES FOR LIVE APPEARANCES IN MANCHESTER, LONDON, BIRMINGHAM AND DUBLIN THIS SUMMER. WE RECENTLY SPOKE WITH GARMAN IN LOS ANGELES ABOUT BATMAN, BABBLE-ON, AND COMING TO BRITAIN.

Starburst: It looks like you've had a really big couple of years, in terms of Batman...

Ralph Garman: It's a big month, that's for sure, but yeah – it's been a good couple of years.

Batman as it pertains to Adam West, especially, starting with how you got him his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. How'd that come about?

It'd bothered me for years that Adam hadn't received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame yet. He was certainly an icon. He was more than Batman – he was Mayor West on *Family Guy*, which had been a huge hit for years. And, the guy was just a great Hollywood survivor story, in my mind. He was a guy who had been typecast coming out of the '60s and he just kept at it and kept at it and kept at it, and now has a whole bunch of fans. So it just seemed to me that it was time. I started the process, and in talking to Adam's management and Adam himself, I found out that his daughter, Nina, had been trying to do the same thing for a number of years, with no success either. We sort of banded together and joined forces to make this work and we did it together for a couple of years before we got the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce to say, "Yes." Once they did, it became the chore of paying for it, because we didn't want Adam to pay for it himself. We thought this was a groundswell thing from his family and fans, so we were going to find some way to pay for the star, so he wouldn't be out of pocket. That's one of the reasons we did the *Evening with Adam West* thing – it was a fundraiser to pay for the star. The people in the audience that night paid, and we also put it on Bandcamp.com for people who wanted to donate something toward the star when they downloaded it. That was another way to make some money. Seth MacFarlane and Fox then stepped up and fronted part of the cost as well, because of his success on *Family Guy*. So it was a nice ending to a long journey – and, as a



matter of fact, there's a documentary coming out later this year called *Staining Adam West*, which is sort of a documentary about Adam and his career and his life, but also about the process that we went through to get him the star. It culminates on the final day there, where Adam asked Seth and myself to speak at the ceremony. It was really a nice way to end up the story, as well as the movie.

In further *Batman* news, you have the *Batman '66 / Green Hornet* crossover series that starts in June. I know Kevin Smith has been involved with *Green Hornet* for a while, but we're curious as to how the two of you teamed up to write this.

Well, when DC and Dynamite decided they were going to do another crossover – as an homage to the classic *Batman* TV series where *Green Hornet* and *Batman* also teamed up – Kevin had had success with *Dynamite*, because they had taken his unproduced *Green Hornet* screenplay and had serialized that and made it into a comic of an updated version of the character. And so, because he had that under his belt, DC came to Kevin and said, "We've already got a successful series running now with the '66 *Batman* comic book" – which is great, by the way; it's one of my favourites – "But we want to do a special crossover book with *Dynamite* featuring *Batman* once again, with *Green Hornet* and Kato. Would you be interested?" And Kevin said, "I am interested. I know *Green Hornet* real well, but the right guy for this project is my partner at *Hollywood Bubble-On*, my friend Ralph Garman, because he is a die-hard 1960s *Batman* fan and he's got this ridiculous collection and he's got this encyclopedic knowledge of the show and the characters... and he's a good writer, too, so you should think about bringing him in." So, DC... well, first of all, they asked, "Can he really write?" Kevin assured them that I could. So, with that, they kind of went on faith of Kevin's endorsement of me to bring me in on the project, and that's how that happened.

Kevin Smith is rather notorious for writing delays. Does your involvement help assuage some peoples' fears?
Yes, in fact, when we started working with DC, they said, "This is great, but are you



KEVIN SMITH AND RALPH GARMAN RECORD HOLLYWOOD BUBBLE-ON

ever going to finish up that whole *Batman* storyline that you started with *Widening Gyre*?" He said, "Oh, yeah, yeah – sure. I'll get to that." But that's the thing: he's a very busy guy and he's done two films, more or less, since the conversation [about *Batman / Green Hornet*] first started, and he's got all these podcasts and TV shows going on and everything. I think this was also a way for DC to know that there was going to be another person pushing on the project, and also a way for Kevin to know that he wasn't going to have to carry the whole load and have to put the whole thing together. He could work as an additional editor, and I would be more than happy to take on the lion's share of the work and really crank out the pages, because I was so thrilled and excited to have a shot at this.

You guys are also working with Ty Templeton on the project, and he's kind of an asset, in terms of the fact that he's done TV-to-comic adaptations before. He's also won some writing awards, himself.

He's just a comic book god, in my eyes. I was a fan of his work for a lot of different reasons. When they started putting out the '66 *Batman* book, Ty had done the work on some of the issues of that. One he did that caught my eye in particular was the one with Mr. Freeze and the Penguin, and his attention to detail and the way he brought that TV show to the page – his brilliant capturing of the likeness of Burgess Meredith as the Penguin – just really blew me away. So, when DC came to Kevin and me and said, "These are the four or five artists we're thinking about for the book: what do you think?", we both saw Ty's name on the list and separately, but unanimously said, "This is the only guy we want to do this with. He'd be perfect for this," because a lot of the guys who are drawing *Batman '66* – they're all terrific artists, but some guys have a more fanciful approach, and some guys have lent a lot of humor to the project with their art and stuff – but Ty really reproduces the feeling and the atmosphere and the likenesses of those characters from that show unlike anybody else I've seen. We knew – especially with the *Green Hornet*, which is more of a "straight" character up against *Batman* – there's lots of humour from that show. We wanted someone who could

produce the book as if you were watching that show. We wanted it to feel almost like they were stills from the set, because we were treating it almost as if it were a script for an episode of the TV show, rather than someone who is taking advantage of the comic book medium and kind of going off with it.

And, just as that will be making its debut in print form, you'll be making your first appearance in the UK with *Hollywood Bubble-On*...

Yeah, that's another exciting moment. We've been doing *Bubble-On* now for three and a half years. The show has just grown in leaps and bounds. We're just blessed in how well-received it's been, how die-hard the fans are, how vocal they are about their support, and how much they enjoy it. It's just been a blast for us to do. We've got a big audience overseas, especially the UK, which is a big Kevin Smith audience anyway. But, they really like the show, and for a long time now, we've been hearing from listeners saying, "Odds of us getting to Los Angeles to see a show are slim. Can you take it on the road?" We didn't really travel with it the first couple of years, and then we started testing the waters around the United States. We played Texas and Vegas and New York City and in Philadelphia. We would take it on the road to great reaction, so it was always in the back of our minds that, if we had the opportunity, we wanted to take it especially to England and Ireland. So, this was our opportunity this summer to put it together. I wish we could've done more. I mean, we're not going to be able to get to Scotland. We tried to make that work, but we couldn't find a theatre that had availability when we were going to be there. So, if this goes well – and we think it will – we're going to come back and do Wales and Scotland, and maybe do some other countries in Europe, as well. So, we'll see what happens.

The 12-part series BATMAN '66 MEETS THE GREEN HORNET begins May 21st digitally, and will be available in print from June 4th. For HOLLYWOOD BUBBLE-ON dates and tickets, hurry over to seesmod.com/overseas



HORROR

Obscura

For this milestone issue of STARBURST, the metamorphosing Martin Vnsworth looks at a key film from the early eighties...

The Importance Of Being An American Werewolf

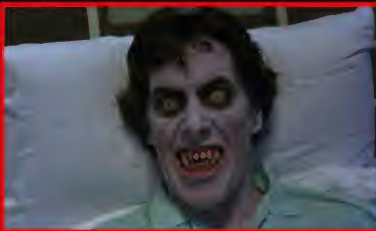
A landmark in modern horror and a turning point in how film make-up effects were recognised was *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). Written and directed by John Landis, it was the recipient of the inaugural Academy Award for outstanding make-up effects, cementing Rick Baker rightfully as a leader in the field. The only other nominee was the late Stan Winston for the forgotten sci-fi romance *Heartbeeps* (Winston would have to wait until 1991 to win a statue for his work on *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*), but the creation of the category at long last recognised the importance of the make-up artist, especially in horror and fantasy films. Before this, any acknowledgment was made as honorary Special Achievement Oscars; the two most notable recipients being William J. Tuttle for the George Pal film, *7 Faces of Dr. Lao* (1964) and John Chambers for *Planet of the Apes* (1968). As groundbreaking as Baker's work on *American Werewolf* was, there's a chicken-and-egg argument prevalent between his stunning transformation of man into wolf and the work of Rob Bottin in Joe Dante's *The Howling*. Baker was actually due to begin work on *The Howling* when he got the call from Landis, telling him he had finally got the backing for his lycanthrope tale, recommending Bottin as he left. Dante's film was, in fact, released before Landis' and also features a very impressive transformation. But for sheer jaw-dropping thrills, Baker's brightly lit, painful metamorphosis wins hands down. Both films are full of humour, *American Werewolf* having a much broader comedic value than the more subtle wit of *The Howling*. It's the latter which probably wins in the horror stakes, but that doesn't take away anything from the scares in Landis' classic.

For the unfamiliar (and if you haven't seen it, you really need to do yourself a favour and rectify that as soon as possible), *American Werewolf* is the story of a pair of friends, David Kessler (David Naughton) and Jack Goodman (Griffin Dunne), who are on a backpacking holiday across Europe. Jack is rather unimpressed that David has taken him to the damp, cold and hostile (if picturesque) Yorkshire moors (which were actually filmed in mid-Wales), rather than head straight to the sunny climate of Italy. Despite warnings from the less than welcoming locals in The Slaughtered Lamb pub (where veteran character actor Brian Glover and future comedy star Rik Mayall are playing chess), the pair drift from the road and start walking in the pouring rain onto the moors. They are attacked by what they think is a wild dog; Jack is torn to pieces and the locals arrive just in time to shoot the beast. However, before David loses consciousness he glances at the beast's body; he sees, not an animal, but a naked, bloodied, man. David wakes several weeks later in a hospital in London, being looked after by Dr. Hirsch (John Woodvine) and the lovely Nurse Alex (*The Railway Children's* Jenny

Agutter). Here, he's disturbed by vivid nightmares - a stunning dream sequence involving Nazi demons slaughtering David's family is as terrifying as anything seen in cinema before and since, and features a great double shock ending. To make matters worse, his dead friend Jack has decided to pay him a visit to warn him that he is, in fact, a werewolf, and will change and kill on the next full moon. While the accolades for Baker's effects more often than not centre on the transformation, it has to be said that the work he does to make Jack a walking corpse is exceptional, especially in this first appearance, as his wounds are still very fresh; his cheek is ripped open and his throat almost non-existent, causing a small piece of flesh to wobble as he speaks. Landis is so confident in Baker's make-up that Jack is clearly seen, the viewer getting the chance to really examine the sickening wounds. The result is truly stomach-churning, but Dunne's chirpy delivery ensures that Jack is never a figure of terror.

True to his word, several days later (after bunking up with Nurse Alex, of course) David changes and goes on a murderous rampage throughout London. As already mentioned, the transformation scene is revolutionary. David's hands, feet and face change in front of the viewer's eyes in a fluid, painful motion. There's no fuzzy dissolves, which had been the previous method of change, nor does the camera cut away, nor the actor hide behind a couch, another cop-out method. Set to one of several versions of the song Blue Moon featured on the soundtrack, the scene is truly shocking; the crunching sound of straining bone adds to the sheer horror of it. Landis also manages to include a bit of humour too, though, as David apologises for how he had earlier referred to his decaying friend: *"I didn't mean to call you a meatloaf, Jack."*

The scenes of the night of carnage are remarkably restrained, and all the more effective because of it. It's the build-up of tension that is paramount, rather than the butchery. When the final victim is stalked in the Underground, the fear is palpable. It's also the best shot of the creature walking, albeit very briefly. Creeping into frame on all fours, it looks impressively large. However, whenever it is seen later, it doesn't look as imposing; much more like a big dog. David awakes the following morning, naked, in the wolf enclosure at London Zoo. Naturally, he's a little disorientated, but he manages to head for the bus home through a series of ingenious thefts to cover his modesty, the best being a young boy's helium-filled balloons, *"A naked American man stole my balloons."* By the time he finally makes it back to Alex's flat, wearing only a woman's stolen coat, she is beside herself with worry. Dr. Hirsch has seen the news of the night's activity and insists the pair head straight over to the hospital for David to be put under observation.





Jumping a cab, they learn of the bloodbath which had occurred the night before: "Puts you in mind of the days of the old demon barber of Fleet Street," the typical cockney cabbie quips, "He must be a right maniac this fella." The taxi driver is played by Alan Ford, who would later carve a niche for himself as the go-to Cockney patriarch in films such as *Snatch*, *The Sweeney* and the superb *Cockneys vs. Zombies*. David hears this news and realises what he has done, and dashes from the cab in order to keep Alex safe for the upcoming night. Unable to get himself arrested, he attempts to kill himself in a phone booth in Piccadilly Circus before spotting a now almost fully decomposed Jack, beckoning him into a porno cinema. They are distracted for a moment by the saucy goings-on being screened. The film, *See You Next Wednesday* is a recurring Landis in-joke; it can be spotted in many of his films (keep an eye open for the saucy poster during the tube attack, it promises 'a non-stop orgy'). This incarnation stars top model of the time Linzi Drew as Brenda Bristols, and is a brilliantly funny spoof of British sex films. It also features a great, laugh-out-loud gag (when 'Gypsy' Dave Cooper enters, finding Drew in bed with Lucien Morgan he storms, "You promised to never do this sort of thing again," only for Morgan to lisp, "I never promised you any such thing!"; "Not you, you twit - her!", to which Drew answers, "I've never seen you before in my life"; Cooper apologises sheepishly and leaves). David is suitably impressed, "Good movie..."

With the pleasantries out of the way, Jack introduces him to the victims of "carnivorous lunar activities", who all have suggestions on how he should do away with himself. "I could hang myself" David offers, but Jack is concerned that if it goes wrong, he could suffer and choke, provoking derision from the murdered gathering; "Do you mind, the man's a friend of mine!" This time, Jack is portrayed by animatronics, as he is almost skeletal. Dunne later revealed he was one of the operators hidden behind the cinema seats.

But with all the talk, it's too late and David undergoes yet another change; this time the transformation is mostly off camera, but one curious punter stands watching while he's pumping the chair in front in agony, presumably thinking he's merely 'enjoying' the cinematic entertainment.

The climactic scenes - mostly filmed both on location in Piccadilly Circus with a few studio inserts - is pure Landis mayhem. It's like *The Blues Brothers* with bite and plenty of gore.

It became, quite rightly, one of the most popular films of the early eighties, and its influence is still felt today. However, the genesis of the story began back in 1969 when Landis was working as a gofer on *Kelly's Heroes*. He had witnessed a bizarre gypsy burial in Yugoslavia, which planted a seed in his mind which later developed into the *Werewolf* script. He shopped his script around throughout the seventies, but no one would back him. That is, until he proved a big success with *Kentucky Fried Movie* and *Animal House*. It predates the 'meta' films of the mid-nineties, in being self referential and knowing. When they discuss David becoming a werewolf, he asks Alex, "Have you ever seen *The Wolf Man*?", before explaining the Universal Pictures film from the forties.

Being filmed in England, the supporting cast is made up of some splendid talent, many of whom went on to bigger things, albeit on the small screen. As well as the aforementioned Glover and Mayall, the acerbic darts player ("You made me miss... I've never missed that board before") is David Schofield, a respected theatre actor, who is forever popping up in TV dramas, most recently as Leonardo's



father in the hit show *Da Vinci's Demons*

and voiced the ominous Owl Man in the fantastic recent Scottish indie flick, *Lord of Tears*. Fans of the old TV show *The Bill* (own up, don't be ashamed) can spot two bobbies who received promotions: the constable in Trafalgar Square who won't arrest David (despite his slanderous accusations about Queen Elizabeth) is Peter Ellis - later Chief Superintendent Brownlow, and the plod who attends the cinema disturbance, John Salthouse, was DJ Galloway. Michael Carter, the tube station victim, later popped up as Bib Fortuna in *Return of the Jedi*. And of course, the US Embassy representative who visits David in hospital is Yoda himself, Frank Oz (he also re-appears during the nightmare as Miss Piggy in a clip from *The Muppet Show*). Landis himself appears in the frantic finale, as the man who is thrown through a shop window after being hit by a car.

The film could have been a very different prospect if the English actor's union Equity had their way. Originally, they didn't want to give Dunne a permit to work; Naughton was already a member having studied in London, so Landis threatened to move the whole production to Paris (even going so far as scouting locations). Of course, in 1997, there would be a very poor sequel set in the French city.

The film's soundtrack was as revolutionary as its special effects. As well as a subtle score by Elmer Bernstein, the film heavily utilised pop songs. This was before it became the norm; most films would only have one or two incidental songs included as background, unless they were music-orientated films (such as Landis' earlier *National Lampoon's Animal House*). The sly, knowing wink to the audience is evident in the song selection, too. All of them have a reference to the moon (Creedence Clearwater Revival's *Bad Moon Rising*, several versions of *Blue Moon* and Van Morrison's *Moondance*, which accompanies the steamy shower scene between David and Alex). Landis had tried to license Cat Stevens' *Moon Shadow* (to use over the opening credits), but the singer had since converted to Islam and refused due to the film's content, as did Bob Dylan for his version of *Blue Moon*. It does seem they missed a trick not having Warren Zevon's brilliant *Werewolves of London*, however (it later turned up in Martin Scorsese's sequel to *The Hustler*, *The Color of Money*). Maybe it would have been a joke too far in a film which skates so delicately between horror and humour. The end credits feature a dedication to Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer on the occasion of their marriage (July 29th, 1981), and at the very end (so is usually missed from TV screenings and casual viewings) there's a gem in the form of a faux announcement, "When in Hollywood visit Universal Studios (ask for Babs)". This is a reference to the *Animal House* character "Babs" Jansen (Martha Smith) who, following the events of that movie, goes on to be a studio tour guide.

On its initial release, it had a lukewarm reception, particularly with 'serious' critics, who were expecting maybe a more straightforward comedy from Landis. For some, it was too scary to be funny and too funny to be scary. Its success, especially with the general audience, really took off when the movie hit video. As a sign of the times, the film, which was originally rated certificate X when it graced British cinemas, has now been down-rated to a mere 15. However, it still holds the power to shock and terrify as well as raise a smile.

Some of the original special effect props were later gifted to Bob Burns (a famous collector and archivist as well as an effects

technician himself). These included the full-size werewolf (which he named Oscar) and the puppet Jack used in the porno theatre. Age and wear had taken their toll on the items but they were lovingly restored to their former glory by a professional crew. For some stunning photographs of the items, be sure to check out the website of the restoration firm, tomspina designs.com. The un-restored Jack looks particularly gruesome!

American Werewolf graced the front cover of *STARBURST*'s 40th issue. Also reviewed that month were Lucio Fulci's brilliant *The Beyond*, Dan (Alien) O'Bannon's *Dead and Buried* and - to prove how eclectic our reach has always been - Disney's *The Fox and the Hound*. When *Shaun of the Dead* director Edgar Wright was asked by the BFI to pick his defining movie for their Screen Epiphanies season in 2013, he picked *American Werewolf*, and explained it was that very issue of *STARBURST* that turned him on to the movie (his introduction to the film is on his website, and is well worth watching). So, like the film itself, *STARBURST* has over the years been very influential, and we can all look forward to another 400 issues.



FIGHT OR IGNITE!

Out this month, SPARKS is the superhero genre's dirty little secret. The titular hero has no powers to speak of, just the ability to take, not to mention dish out, one hell of a beating. When Sparks loses all that he has, he must fight to regain what truly matters, with twists, turns and sleek action aplenty. We were lucky enough to grab time with some of the key players of this low-budget, high-entertainment feature...

Words: Andrew Pollard

CHRIS FOLINO [WRITER/CO-DIRECTOR]

The mind behind the original Sparks graphic novel, Folino followed his 2006 film *Gamers* by fulfilling his itch to turn Sparks into a full-blown movie...

Firstly, congratulations, Sparks is a massively enjoyable film. When we originally set out to make it, it was just one of those things where you wanted to go ahead and try and do it. Originally we were going to get some friends together and try to make it happen. Michael Bell was somebody we met many years ago, and his daughter Ashley. Before she was famous she actually helped us with the motion comic book, and it was one of those things where she did the voicing and then got famous with *The Last Exorcism*. She said she'd do the movie, and it kinda snowballed from there. Before we knew it, Clancy Brown was interested in it. It was one of those things where we just saved up for a long time and we just shot for 12 days with two different crews. What we ended up doing was, once we had

saved up enough funds, 6 months later we asked Clancy to come back and shoot another day.

So Sparks was all self-funded then?

Yeah. We have day jobs. I kept looking round, looking at the crew, and thinking we could totally make a movie. I don't have enough money for it, but Todd was my A.D. I said, "I know we can do this, Todd," and he'd look at me like I was the dumbest idiot in the world for trying to do a two-crew thing. When it happened, it was like, "OK, what do you have to do to make it work." When you have an opportunity to have Ashley Bell and Clancy Brown, it was one of those things that I said, "I'll talk to my wife." It was just sort of a wonderful group that assembled kind of by accident. Ashley Bell's agent suggested two actors; one of the actors was a kid who looked like a rip-off of Jonah Hill, and the other one was Chase Williamson. It was before *John Dies at the End* was finished and it was only a trailer, but I heard his voice. I thought it would be really cool if we could get somebody who was actually 23

years old, or 21, who could actually play Sparks. Most of the superhero movies, they're much older. We just loved his zeal, invited him to Thanksgiving to have lunch, we met, and I just liked the kid a lot. I said, "Hey, if you can lose 30lbs in 5 weeks..." and he did. He trained real hard. He had a tough, tough time on the film because we were shooting days and nights, and he's in 85% of the movie. The poor kid got hammered, but it's to his testament that he did a great job and he was always prepared for each scene.

TODD BURROWS [CO-DIRECTOR]

A long time cohort of Folino's, Burrows moved away from the world of commercials in order to break his feature film cherry by co-helming Sparks.

Sparks was your first movie, right?

That's right. Chris and I both came from the commercial world of advertising, working together for a few years. As we were working on some projects, he invited me in on this. We just basically tried to figure out how to accomplish this



with the amount of time that we have and our resources — what would be the best plan. He is the writer, but he had a lot of scenes that he wanted me to take care of, a lot of the action scenes, with my experience. So we kind of divied-up the movie and we had a team of DPs. It went two full units, but we shot the bulk of it in a series of 12 nights.

How difficult was it to shoot the film?

It looks as if there was a lot of post-production work involved...

That was the big thing. The good news is, a lot of the commercials and things we'd done required a lot of CG. Now it's becoming more commonplace — actors have become more accustomed to it and have had experience with it. It's easier for actors to imagine what's going to be put in or sticking to eye lines. People can easily imagine it now, so it really wasn't a difficult path. But we know a lot of the scale, we'd have to rely on that. Fortunately, we had two or three guys that did all of the post-production effects, and I think it's just amazing what they managed to pull off, especially on this scale and this level. There weren't legions of special effects artists from across the world — this was just three guys sat around a computer. It's really remarkable, and I don't think it could have happened five years ago.

JACKSON MYERS [CINEMATOGRAPHER]

Given the look of the Sparks book, being responsible for the look and feel of the movie was a big task. One that Myers was definitely up for.

How did you find working on Sparks?

It was an amazing experience. The feature was condensed into two weeks shooting, and we were lucky enough to have the graphic novel at our disposal, so it was like having these pre-drawn, beautifully-done storyboards that we could base the film's look off of. It was long days and long nights, as always, but in the end I'm really happy with the end product. Both Chris and Todd did a wonderful job directing.

How easy was it to keep the tone and feel of the Sparks book when adapting for the big screen?

I wouldn't say it was easy. Everybody was in it together and we had a visual profile



set before we even started filming. It's one thing to have a graphic novel and have it on paper, but to turn that into live-action, it creates so many more elements to harness. It was difficult and challenging, and I think all of the challenges really paid off. We had four RED cameras going, two separate units going simultaneously. We used green screen, although most of it was practical locations.

How was it, trying to obtain the final product that you wanted but within a relatively small budget?

It was a great challenge to have, but I'm really happy with the final product. I think we made the most of what we had. The directors had a vision and we were able to take it through to the end. And the music, I think the score was done phenomenally and really helps carry the moment of each scene. It was a really worthwhile experience for me creatively, and I learnt a lot from the beginning to the end.

BILL KATT [EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/ACTOR]

After a career that took in the likes of *Carrie*, *House* and *The Greatest American Hero*, Katt discusses how he became involved in Sparks way back when it was just an idea.

You've been quite involved with Sparks from the get-go. How did that happen?
Chris' first foray into movie-making was a



very funny, kinda semi-autobiographical mockumentary called *Gamers*, about a bunch of guys playing a *Dungeons & Dragons*-type game for 22, 23-year-olds. It was a very funny look at that, and my friends, Kelly LeBrock, Beverly D'Angelo, John Heard and I were all in that, and that's where I first met Chris many years ago. Chris has the stories, I have stories to tell, so we jumped into the market. Sparks was the first story, which was really Chris' brainchild. We talked about it, we launched five books of the seven, and we never actually got to finish. But Sparks, we did some motion comic books after that and we had some limited but good reviews with that. So we said let's completely bankrupt ourselves and do a feature film, and that's what we did. We were able to assemble Clancy Brown and Ashley Bell and Chase Williamson and Jake Busey and myself and a few other people. And we made a pretty darn good little film in twelve days!

When you became involved in the film, was it always the case that you were going to be playing Metanza?

When we did the motion comics, I played the part of Archer, but when it came to the day that we were planning, I had a bad accident where I completely tweaked my back and could barely move. So we had to scramble and get somebody else, and fortunately our dear friend Michael Bell was good friends with Clancy Brown. I have served with Clancy on the Screen





Actors Guild, and he graciously consented to step in for that role and save the day. It turns out he was a wonderful choice, and he lends a lot of gravitas to the production because of his appearance. I was able to play Metanza because there was no real physical stuff to do and you could see him being kind of stiff, that was because I couldn't move my neck.

Is there any chance of there being a Sparks follow-up?

Well we have a story in the back of our mind to tell. But first we have to see how the roll-out goes, and if we can recoup some of our losses over the next year, year and a half, then I think we've learned an awful lot and we will definitely jump back in. We have, I think, an equally-compelling, if better, story to tell in the sequel.

JAKE BUSEY [ACTOR]

The son of the legendary Gary Busey, Jake has appeared in the likes of *Starship Troopers*, *The Frighteners* and *Identity*. Here he gives his views on the Sparks experience...

Pitch Sparks to us...

It's a cool little underdog, action-packed, home-spun superhero film.

How did you wind up involved in the movie?

Well one of the producers on the film is like an uncle to me, a very old famous friend, a dear friend. William Katt and my father go way back. So Bill gave me a call and said that his friend was putting a movie together and asked if I'd be interested in playing a role. And I said that'd be great. It was just kind of an organic occurrence.

How was it working with the cast of Sparks?

It was quite a mish-mash of characters, on screen and off. A great review of diversity and variety with the actors. I had worked with Clancy Brown on *Starship Troopers* and I was really looking forward to seeing him again 15 years later. But being with Bill and working with Chris — great people — we were very much under the gun. We were just trying to get the basics of what we had to get — where's the jacket, where's the wig, do we have the location, can we get this actor on this night? There was just always a battle to keep the production going, keep it moving. We even stopped filming for a while so that they could get some more money. It was quite an adventurous little task, quite a challenging experience.

CLINT HOWARD [ACTOR]

Having taken in big hitters like *Apollo 13*, character actor Howard talks about what drew him to this low-budget superhero movie.

What excited you about Sparks?

I really like the idea that these guys really did make a movie in a very short period of time. Movies like *Harry Potter* spend more

on craft service in a week than we spent making this! \$350,000 — it's amazing! I get tired of films that are too self-important.

Had you read the graphic novel before getting involved?

I hadn't. Originally, Chris wrote the story in several comic books. I flicked through a few of those. The final graphic novel itself is a pretty good replica of the movie but the excellent thing about Chris is he came up with this concept, imagined and created this world that Sparks lived in, and yet he was certainly willing to change dialogue, discuss attitudes, motivations. It really felt collaborative.

SPARKS is out now on DVD/Blu-ray, and is reviewed on page 76. For more from the SPARKS cast & crew, head to STARBURSTMAGAZINE.COM



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POMPEII

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: PAUL W.S. ANDERSON / SCREENPLAY: JANET SCOTT BATCHLER, LEE BATCHLER, JULIAN FELLOWES, MICHAEL ROBERT JOHNSON / STARRING: KIT HARINGTON, EMILY BROWNING, KIEFER SUTHERLAND, ADEWALE AKINNUOYE-AGBAJE, CARRIE-ANNE MOSS, JARED HARRIS, SASHA ROIZ / RELEASE DATE: MAY 2ND

January and February typically act as a dumping ground for the major US studios' unloved outputs. The Lego Movie managed to buck the trend this year but usually cinematic turkeys such as *I, Frankenstein* or *A Good Day to Die Hard* are rushed out under cover of winter darkness to indifferent audiences while the punters patiently await the summer blockbusters. None of which bodes well for *Pompeii*. That sinking feeling only grows when the dreaded words "A film by Paul W.S. Anderson" appear on



screen, but despite initial appearances, this is no rehash of the Resident Evil films with volcanic lava standing in for waves of zombies. For a start *Milla Jovovich* is nowhere to be seen, the film instead focusing on Kit Harington's Milo, essentially Jon Snow from *Game of Thrones*, missing his big fur coat and with his stunning abs on prominent display. Orphaned by evil Romans, Milo has grown up as a slave and a gladiator, proving his mettle in the dank province of Britannia before being shipped off to greater glory in Pompeii.

Once he arrives, the film turns into an enjoyable mash-up of *Gladiator* and *Titanic*, as it takes the arena combat from Ridley Scott's epic (lifting the siege of Carthage arena sequence almost verbatim) and the star-crossed lovers, an imminent disaster and a scheming, moustache-twirling villain from James Cameron's watery romance, as Milo must deal with the other gladiators, abusive handlers, scheming parents and a delightfully hammy Kiefer Sutherland in his quest to survive the coming storm, and hopefully romance Emily Browning's Cassia in the process.

The film spends a surprising amount of its time setting up the players and the world of Pompeii before springing the inevitable cameo from

our old friend, pyroclastic flow, in a small but essential role, and the film is all the better for it. The effects are well done with the Roman times well realised and some political shenanigans thrown in to reflect the coming fall of the Roman empire. Moss and Harris are adequate as Cassia's parents and Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje fits the Djimon Hounsou role from *Gladiator* like a glove. As for the rest of the cast, all the Romans appear to be graduates from the James Mason school of Roman acting, all clipped English accents and over-pronunciation. Kiefer Sutherland takes this one step further by seemingly adding pebbles to his mouth for a cartoonish, lispy performance as Senator Corvus; war criminal, scheming would-be husband to Cassia and chewer of scenery. Sutherland's over the top performance borders on comical but is so completely different to the scowly, rasping characters he's been playing since Jack Bauer that he is a joy to watch and thankfully he doesn't manage to completely destabilise the film.

Once Vesuvius does pipe up, it's a race against time to reunite the separated characters and escape Corvus and the city before it's too late through numerous actions scenes and false escapes. The inclusion of a mini-tsunami does come off a little crass after all the terrifying footage from the Japanese tsunami of 2011 that was seen around the world, but apparently it has some basis in fact.

Anderson directs competently and clearly, with action scenes in which the audience can actually see what is going on and his camera drinking in the devastation wrought by the volcano, without making it too flashy. He is ably assisted by Clinton Shorter's score, which never quite scales the heights of Hans Zimmer's *Gladiator* soundtrack but does manage to elicit the appropriate emotions without coming across as cloying.

All this, along with a very surprising ending, hopefully marks an increased maturity and the start of a new chapter for Anderson as a director. He's managed to create an enjoyable historical disaster movie, rather than a disastrous one.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 8



NOAH

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: DARREN ARONOFSKY / SCREENPLAY: DARREN ARONOFSKY, ARI HANDEL / STARRING: RUSSELL CROWE, JENNIFER CONNELLY, ANTHONY HOPKINS, RAY WINSTONE, EMMA WATSON, LOGAN LERMAN, DOUGLAS BOOTH, NICK NOLTE, FRANK LANGELLA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Maths, drugs, wrestling, ballet, a millennium of love and death and now a biblical tale: Darren Aronofsky picks a wide variety of subjects for his films, but one thing always present is a breakdown of the human psyche. So, a man chosen by God (or rather, 'The Creator' - much to the annoyance of many Christians) to build a giant ark to save creation should fit right in.

In an ambiguous time period, Noah (Crowe), his wife Naameh (Connelly) and their sons are living in isolation. Mankind is corrupt and sinful and led by the ruthless King Tubal-Cain (Winstone), who murdered Noah's father. Noah starts to witness miracles and visions that prompt him to take his family to visit his grandfather Methuselah (Hopkins), a wise old man who also provides some comic relief. On

the way they adopt an orphaned, barren girl called Ila (Watson) who they raise as their own. Shortly afterwards they're also chased by Tubal-Cain's men, who retreat when they enter the land of The Watchers (Nolte and Langella amongst others), fallen angels turned into monstrous rock-like creatures (think *The NeverEnding Story*).

With the help of Methuselah and The Watchers, Noah starts to build the ark. So far no one's seemed against it, and the years pass. His children grow up in the best tree house ever and Ila and one of Noah's sons, Shem (Booth) become an item, keeping it in the family. The animals arrive and a 'how will they?' question is answered straight away. Inevitably the flood and Tubal-Cain and his cannibalistic men arrive, and you suddenly have a hell

on Earth that Bosch would be proud of.

This is the best part of the movie - when it is filled with action and lives up to its ambition after much slow burning. But this is an Aronofsky film and it's not just about a man and his ark. Noah's sons need wives, especially second eldest Ham (Lerman) who's feeling a bit lonely. Here enter the subplots that keep the film going, for a bit too long unfortunately. How can the sons have wives if there are no good people left? Doesn't the Creator (and therefore Noah) want mankind to die? And what if Ila isn't barren after all? What are the odds of Tubal-Cain getting on that ark? Bet now...

Noah is ambitious but goes on for too long and overcomplicates itself. What could have had a classic simplicity is expanded too much, especially after a promising start. The film seems scared of being too religious or secular, old or modern, and sits somewhere awkwardly in-between. Some special effects work (the flood and battle sequence), some don't (the 'tweaked' animals), and Ray Winstone steals the film playing Ray Winstone. Awkward subjects like incest (and, more importantly, who's going to clean up all that animal poop?!) are glossed over, focusing more on the turmoil of a man who has to make impossible choices.

An interesting watch, but not quite the epic it could have been.

JONATHAN ANDERSON



EXPECTED + + + + + + + + + + 8

ACTUAL + + + + + + + + + + 6



CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: ANTHONY RUSSO, JOE RUSSO / SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER MARKUS, STEPHEN MCFEELY / STARRING: CHRIS EVANS, SCARLETT JOHANSSON, SEBASTIAN STAN, ANTHONY MACKIE, COBIE SMULDERS, FRANK GRILLO, EMMY VANCAMP, HAYLEY ATWELL, ROBERT REDFORD, SAMUEL L. JACKSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Marvel must have a hell of a lot of confidence in *The Winter Soldier*. Before it's even out in the theatres, they've announced that the Captain's third solo adventure will be released the same day as Warner's forthcoming *Batman/Superman* face-off. Fortunately their confidence is well placed because, for the most part, *The Winter Soldier* is a bigger, better movie than its predecessor, and one of the strongest entries in the MCU to date.

From the opening setpiece, which sees the Cap, accompanied by Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow, lead a S.H.I.E.L.D. strike team to free hostages on a terrorist-commandeered ship, this feels like a very different movie than the studio has attempted before; closer to *Bourne* or *Bond* than previous Marvel entries. It's also, and somewhat strangely considering its directors Anthony and Joe Russo are best known for comedies like *Arrested Development*, the most serious of the studio's movies to date.

Setting the action, barring a few flashbacks, in the present day, it'd be very easy for the film to play the fish out of water card again, especially given the rather abrupt end to Rogers' previous solo outing. Wisely, it largely avoids going down this route (although kudos for mentioning Nirvana and Sean Connery on the Cap's

list of things he needs to catch up on), and instead focuses on another aspect of Captain America that's out of date in the 21st Century – his moral compass.

One of the biggest cinematic drawbacks of the character is how strait-laced he is. Like Superman, he's largely fighting for truth, justice and the American way. But what happens in a world where the American way is no longer straightforward? In the case of Superman, the result was to darken the character, with mixed results, in last year's *Man of Steel*. *The Winter Soldier* goes down a different route. In a world where S.H.I.E.L.D. is advocating hi-tech, pre-emptive strikes against its enemies, Rogers' 1940s sense of right and wrong comes into sharp conflict with the realities of 21st century politics.

This is the most political, complicated Marvel movie to date. Yes, Tony Stark has fought terrorists, but here the line between right and wrong is more ambiguous. When we live in a time where suspected terrorists are routinely targeted by drone strikes, this is the closest Marvel Studios has come to dealing with real world issues.

The other main drawback of the character is, frankly, he's not the most exciting superhero in Marvel's armoury. Lacking Tony Stark's humour and cool gadgets, or Bruce Banner's ability to hulk

out, or even Thor's absurdity, he can, despite Chris Evans' admirable efforts, come across as a little bland. Fortunately the film counteracts this by making full use of its impressive ensemble cast. Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury gets by far his most screen time to date, including a superb, mid-movie action setpiece, and more importantly, we finally get a *Pulp Fiction* reference. Similarly, the superb Scarlett Johansson gets almost as big a role as Evans (seriously Marvel, stop messing about and make a *Black Widow* movie. She's more than earned it). It's almost as big an ensemble piece as *The Avengers*, with only Anthony Mackie's Falcon really failing to make much of an impression. We're also treated to an impressive array of supporting characters, both familiar (Garry Shandling's repellent senator, Maria Hill, and an all too brief return for Peggy Carter), new (Alan Dale manages to cross off another name from his ever dwindling list of major franchises he hasn't appeared in), as well as the now obligatory surprise cameo during one of two end credit scenes.

After already battling Hydra and alien invaders, Captain America's third cinematic outing sees something rotten inside S.H.I.E.L.D. After voicing concerns about the organisation's new, darker direction to Fury's boss Alexander Pierce (a superbly slimy Robert Redford. Good to have you back, sir) all hell breaks loose, with Rogers and Fury targeted by hit squads and super assassin the Winter Soldier.

The titular character is effectively sinister, a seemingly unstoppable, Terminator-style force. Giving us bits and pieces of his backstory, he remains largely an enigma. Yes, we find out his origin (largely consistent with his comic appearances) but little beyond that. The film makes the wise decision not to overuse him, having him appear in short, effective bursts before unleashing him fully in the finale.

And it's in the finale that things finally start to stutter. There's nothing bad about it, it's just that up until that point, it's easy to forget you're watching another superhero movie. It's only when we reach the climax, and things revert to one of Marvel's now obligatory epic battles, that the things start to feel like we've been here before.

For the most part though, it's a bold movie, and one that has actual implications for the MCU. It'll be interesting to see how the faltering Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. in particular deals with the fallout. It's an entertaining, different addition to Marvel's canon, and all the better for it. Whether the Captain is a strong enough solo character to take on *Batman* and *Superman* though is another matter entirely. May 2016 is going to be very interesting indeed.

IAIN ROBERTSON

EXPECTED ++++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++++ 8



THE ZERO THEOREM

CERT. 15 / DIRECTOR: TERRY GILLIAM / SCREENPLAY: PAT RUSHIN / STARRING: CHRISTOPH WALTZ, MÉLANIE THIERRY, DAVID THEWLIS, LUCAS HEDGES, MATT DAMON, TILDA SWINTON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The meaning of life, the universe and everything is not, in fact, 42 as Douglas Adams once suggested. Actually, it all means nothing. Zilch. Nada. Zero. That's the theory director Terry Gilliam is going with in his latest foray into science fiction dystopia land with *The Zero Theorem*.

Christoph Waltz is Qohen Leth, a bald man who refers to himself in the plural and insists that he is dying due to his hair loss and crumbling mental state. Living in a dilapidated old church to block out the bright, frantic, noisy world of the future, Leth is a miserable number-cruncher determined to convince Management (Matt Damon) to let him work at home due to his health problems. When he is granted his disability request and given the task of solving the elusive zero

theorem from home, Management sends in lusty call girl Bainsley (Mélanie Thierry) and teenage whizz kid Bob (Lucas Hedges) to help stop him from disappearing down into a black hole of despair.

Terry Gilliam, it seems, thinks little of the future, little of the state of human existence and little of what makes your average cinema goer happy. There is next to nothing here that will satisfy mainstream audiences but plenty to get your grey matter wrapped around if you are looking for something a little more substantial, if utterly quizzical. Oddly for a film about the meaning of nothing, *The Zero Theorem* is rich with detail and could in fact be about everything. Love, life, sex, death, religion, technology, existence, creation and control; it's all here in a deceptively simple set up.

Though *The Zero Theorem* rarely leaves Leth's ramshackle old church and Waltz is barely off screen, it is about more than just a man waiting for the phone to ring. The deluded Leth is a workaholic waiting for someone to give meaning to his life. When his supervisor Joby (David Thewlis) invites him to parties, he hides away from the other guests. When Bainsley comes into his life, he cannot connect with her until it becomes a virtual relationship. Only the teenage Bob can help Leth understand his futile search for meaning and recognise the things in life that might actually be worth working for.

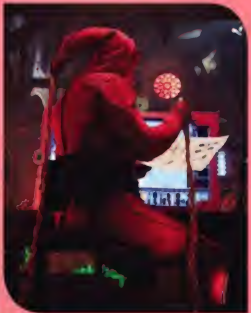
When Leth does go outside however, it is easy to see why he wishes to stay indoors. The future of *The Zero Theorem* is a loud, impersonal, hectic nightmare of bright colours, invasive advertising and people glued to their personal hand-held devices. Management watches over everything, with

CCTV cameras constantly recording, and advances in technology have only made life and work ever harder to separate.

Gilliam uses visual effects wonderfully, with detailed production design making *The Zero Theorem* a film you could immediately watch again. The sets, locations, costumes and props are all lovingly created, even if they sometimes look as though Gilliam's vision of the future has not moved on since he made *Brazil* almost 30 years ago. However, Waltz and Mélanie Thierry wield real emotional heft, so that the style is almost matched by the substance. Waltz in particular is utterly convincing as Leth, his long face and often naked body complementing a master class performance in misery. Thierry will get a lot of attention for her array of outstandingly sexy costumes but fortunately the heart, soul and sweetness of Bainsley is eventually given time to emerge from beneath the bubbly sex kitten exterior.

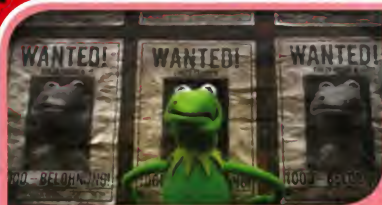
The Zero Theorem is Gilliam clearly in his comfort zone. It is deliberately and confidently weird and wacky. For anyone who has questioned the meaning of existence, staring out into a black void and realising that all human life is essentially meaningless, you will be sure to find a kindred spirit in Leth. The fact that *The Zero Theorem* also finds humour and heart in its story of soul-sucking emptiness just shows what a wonderful filmmaker Gilliam can be.

PETE TURNER



EXPECTED + + + + + + + + + + 8

ACTUAL + + + + + + + + + + 8



MUPPETS MOST WANTED

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: JAMES BOBIN / SCREENPLAY: JAMES BOBIN, NICHOLAS STOLLER / STARRING: RICKY GERVAIS, STEVE WHITMIRE, ERIC JACOBSON, TINA FEY, TY BURRELL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Taking place straight after the last film, *Muppets Most Wanted* sees the gang acquire a new tour manager in Gervais' shady Dominic Badguy (aren't you?). Under his suggestion, the gang go on a lavish world tour, but the world's most dangerous frog, Constantine (issue 398's cover star) has escaped and in a case of mistaken identity Kermit is arrested and Constantine imitates him on the tour, all in an

attempt to pull off the biggest crime of the century. Will the gang uncover this green doppelganger? Or will Kermit be trapped in the inescapable Siberian Gulag?

Muppets Most Wanted is a sequel that chooses to make things bigger, and whilst that does not always indicate better, this globetrotting crime adventure is every bit as enjoyable as you would expect. The jokes are fast, vivacious and constantly irreverent,

with Bobin and Stoller's screenplay embellishing its musical trappings, creating some wicked tracks that will make even the tone deaf among you tap a foot (webbed or otherwise).

Certain fans may disapprove of some of the occasional bigger effects used and the notable lack of Jason Segal/Amy Adams-esque warm human leads (although Tina Fey's Russian prison guard Nadya, is terrifically barmy), but this is the *Muppets* show and they are as loveable as ever. Gervais actually remains somewhat restrained in the film (which may disappoint some but is actually a wise tactic, allowing the zany critters to bounce off him – sometimes literally). The puppet work is astounding in parts, and all the crew are present, including Kermit, Fozzie Bear, Miss Piggy, Animal and Walter (introduced in the last film), with a bigger part this time for the stone-faced Sam the Eagle. Even those Muppet characters that don't get big parts are allowed their comic zingers (the best

of which may be Statler and Waldorf's misinterpretation of a Berlin billboard). Although it is the villain Constantine who is the greatest find of this sequel, an old school moustache-twirling (or mole stroking in this case) baddie and the driving force for the occasionally unstructured country-hopping plot.

Muppets Most Wanted is like a stage show the director was too entertained to call "cut" on, and while this means the craziness is stretched a bit at 113 minutes, audiences will emerge pleased. Bret McKenzie again pens some cracking musical numbers that progress the narrative and feel welcome as opposed to stuffed in. This is a film that does not far exceed expectations, but, like one of Fozzie's gags, delivers exactly what you expect. Most will come away cheery, humming and more than ready to attend the next great Muppet caper.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ++++++ 8
ACTUAL ++++++ 7



THE LAST DAYS ON MARS

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: RUAIRI ROBINSON / SCREENPLAY: CLIVE DAWSON / STARRING: LIEV SCHREIBER, ELIAS KOTEA, ROMOLA GARAI, OLIVIA WILLIAMS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This feature film debut from Ruairi Robinson centres on the first manned mission to Mars. We find ourselves on the Tantalus Base, headed up by Commander Brunel (Koteas), as the crew are getting ready to depart the red planet. That is, until a strange discovery is made. When scientist Marko (Goran Kostic) decides to leave the ship to investigate a potential living organism, things take a

turn for the dark and sinister. As tragedy strikes, the rest of the crew, with Schreiber's Campbell at the fore, attempt a recovery mission. With other members of the crew experiencing their own traumas, it appears that this initial discovery is a lot more troubling than first perceived. So much so, the affected crew members seem to turn into some sort of zombie.

A unique premise, there is

a lot of plus points about *The Last Days on Mars*. Schreiber, an actor that often divides opinion, does well as the lead of the film, and Olivia Williams and Elias Koteas also shine. That said, it's always good to see Koteas in anything! The zombie spin offers something different, and it generally works. Quite what the origins of the organism/infection are and how it comes to spread is a little hazy at times, but that never feels a massively major concern here. And on the zombie front, these aren't your standard plodding walker-types, these are actually smart, aggressive zombies.

At times, *The Last Days on Mars* feels like a throwback to classic sci-fi suspense horror of decades gone by. And that's where the movie's strengths lie: in its build and its crawling tension teases. Sure, the conviction is occasionally flawed, but the film is by no means a waste of your time. Pulling from such films as *Alien*, *Apollo 18*, *Prometheus* and John Carpenter's *The Thing* (and even videogames like the *Dead Space* series), *The Last*

Days on Mars makes for a solid, impressive watch with a few choice thrills, even if it never really makes any major steps towards maximising its potential. That said, Robinson shows a lot of promise as a filmmaker, the central roles are delivered strongly, and there's some good scares tied to a novel premise, not to mention a tension-heavy score that adds superbly to the overall atmosphere and tone of the film.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++ 6
ACTUAL ++++++ 6





THE DOUBLE

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: RICHARD AYOADE / SCREENPLAY: RICHARD AYOADE, AVI KORINE / STARRING: JESSE EISENBERG, MIA WASKOWSKA, CHRIS O'DOWD, JAMES FOX, PADDY CONSIDINE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Richard Ayoade's sophomore turn in the director's chair confirms our suspicions from his first movie, 2011's quirky coming-of-age comedy/drama *Submarine*. Ayoade just ain't interested in becoming Britain's answer to Michael Bay. After all *The Double* is based on a novella by Dostoyevsky and, unless we're very much mistaken, *Transformers 4* isn't. But Ayoade, still best known from his role as computer nerd Moss in *The IT Crowd*,

may just, however, become the natural successor to Terry Gilliam (although we're hoping that Mr G has a few good years and movies left in him yet).

And it's Gilliam's magnum opus *Brazil* that *The Double*, surely not unintentionally, resembles. Set in some dour, featureless maybe-not-this-reality dystopian Hell, *The Double* stars Jesse Eisenberg as ordinary Joe, Simon James, working unnoticed and unappreciated in a grim, grey

Gilliamesque administrative job. Simon is stunned when James Simon turns up for work and he's a dead ringer (or double, if you will) for Simon but with a brash, outspoken, outgoing personality which is the exact opposite of Simon's quiet, shy, unassuming demeanour. So unremarkable is Simon that no one seems to notice that he's suddenly got a charismatic doppelgänger. Simon has a crush on cute co-worker Hannah (Waskowska), but hasn't got a clue how he should woo her until James offers him some advice in the art of gentle seduction. But James is a faster worker than Simon and soon not only is Hannah slipping away from Simon's grasp, so is his grip on reality.

Ayoade battles manfully against his doubtlessly tiny budget to create a stifling, uncomfortably grey world which, despite its resemblance to similar dystopias in other, frankly better films, still manages to convince in its depiction of an unsettling, disorientating environment populated by slightly not-right characters. Eisenberg makes

for a compelling and wide-eyed, if sometimes slightly irritating, leading man but the film's best moments are those which amplify its themes of paranoia and creeping madness by presenting welcome, if all too-brief, cameos from the likes of Tim Key, the brilliant maverick comic genius Chris Morris and Ayoade's old *IT Crowd* sparring partner Chris O'Dowd, as well as virtually the entire cast of *Submarine*. Eventually, spotting the film's influences, whether it's Gilliam, or Lynch's *Eraserhead*, amongst others, is rather more satisfying than the film's inevitably ambiguous 'is this real or isn't it?' storyline and *The Double* suffers because it can't decide whether it wants to be an art house thriller or a mainstream mystery. But Ayoade keeps it all moving at a decent clip. It's impressively atmospheric and, in the end, it's the product of a promising director whose work can only get better and, hopefully, more strikingly individual.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 7



RIO 2

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: CARLOS SALDANHA / SCREENPLAY: DON RHYMER, JENNY BICKS, YONI BRENNER, CARLOS KOTKIN / STARRING: JESSE EISENBERG, ANNE HATHAWAY, BRUNO MARS, LESLIE MANN, JEMAIN CLEMENT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Back in 2011, Carlos Saldanha's colourful animated adventure *Rio* became a surprise hit, generating almost \$500 million worldwide. So of course a sequel had to come flapping into cinemas. *Rio* hardly broke new ground but it was beautifully animated, vibrant, family aimed fun and this sequel is more of the same for fans. Where many sequels either lazily cash in or

try to do too much, Saldanha approaches this follow-up with an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach. *Rio 2* is by no means a revelation but it's a very enjoyable movie all the same. Many will expect a film of the same breed as the first and in many ways this is what you get, albeit with some rather unexpected influences.

We catch up with nervy rare Spix's Macaws Blu (Eisenberg) and his wife Jewel

(Hathaway) plus family and friends in Rio de Janeiro. However when their human owners find evidence of more Spix's Macaws in the Amazon, the blue-feathered crew embark on a journey of family, danger and spirit.

While some of the script misses the mark, the goodwill is hard to hate. Certain aspects, like the addition of the showy Macaw Roberto (Mars) annoy and there are a few subplots – mainly Rafael (George Lopez), Nico (Jamie Foxx) and Pedro's (Will.i.am) Amazonian talent scouting – that feel a bit forced.

But the characters remain interesting and likeable and the voiceover is well cast. As for the villains, ruthless loggers, one of whom has a lollipop fixation and a nasty pet monkey, take up main badgie duties but it is the returning Nigel (Clement) who shines. Even if he is a touch underused.

Clement is hilarious, perfecting the seething Shakespearean villainy of the character and the new addition of his poisonous frog sidekick/love interest Gabbi (Chenoweth) is an excellent

move. Nigel steals the movie, offering a far more interesting revenge plot than some of the main family-centric occurrences of the movie. Still, kids will delight at Rio 2 and adults will likely enjoy the breezy inoffensiveness of it all and the film's well-intentioned message of respecting the natural world. The musical numbers are mostly great fun, aside from the odd strained track, and don't hamper the overall momentum (the best song is "Poisonous Love", the ballad-like number between Chenoweth and Clement).

The *Rio* series, if indeed that is where we are heading, is not the most absorbing, meaningful or impacting animated franchise out there, but it's not unwelcome either; its heart is in the right place and when its better qualities shine, the family entertainment is hard to beat. Enjoyable, well-animated, humorous fun, and Nigel alone makes *Rio 2* worth the watch.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL ++++++ 7



THE LEGEND OF HERCULES

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: RENNY HARLIN / SCREENPLAY: DANIEL GIAT, GIULIO STEVE, RENNY HARLIN, SEAN HOOD / STARRING: KELLEN LUTZ, GAIA WEISS, SCOTT ADKINS, ROXANNE MCKEE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Some films just have to be seen on the big screen. They are made for the experience of movie-going; the scent of popcorn wafting through the auditorium, the speakers thumping against the walls, the hushed tones of anticipation that fill the stadium with that palpable sense of excitement.

And some films are best enjoyed in the comfort of your own home. With you and your closest friends snuggled around the screen, enacting your own pace, laughing without regard and providing your own commentary.

And there are some films that should just not be viewed in any capacity... The Legend of Hercules is one of those films.

Director Renny Harlin seems to have bought into the prevailing theory that he cannot direct himself out of an IKEA – which is a shame since Die Hard 2 and The Long Kiss Goodnight are both quality action romps. Harlin now seems adamant to wipe out any good graces the former allowed him with his vision for Hercules, which is perhaps the perfect storm of bad movies.

Getting past the fact that

the film offers absolutely nothing new in terms of artistic or technical achievement, it commits the cardinal sin of muddying its allegories, painting Hercules as both a vigilante and a Christ-like redeemer.

After a fairly guttural opening, which introduces the audience in a sweeping manner to the ransacking of Argos, it takes an absolutely spectacular nosedive. The depiction of the Virgin Birth aside, which is hilarious if you've ever wondered how Joseph would have reacted walking in on Mary being pleased in the bedroom by a faceless entity, the film's first act plods along for what seems like hours. The battle with the Nemean Lion, which in the mythology is the First Labour of Hercules, is casually tossed into a rather confusing set-piece – though you could be forgiven for asking why Hercules is wrestling a ginormous Furby.

And so the film wanders aimlessly from point to point for a distressingly long time. Much like the years following the release of The Matrix, where every other tent pole summer film had a not-so-great bullet time sequence, The Legend of Hercules seems intent on

ransacking anything remotely original that has come before it.

Kellen Lutz leads the way as the Grecian Demigod, and proves himself capable of being immortalised in a Twilight standee and not much else. He attempts to channel Russell Crowe, much like the whole films does, but it unfortunately has a lot more in common with Showtime's Spartacus than it does with anything remotely professional.

You could be forgiven for thinking that The Legend of Hercules might be a fun, throwaway piece of entertainment. But you'd be wrong. Not only does the film last around 45 minutes (once you remove the insanely decadent amount of slow-mo), it makes the unforfeitable error of employing a creative team without a lick of a creative voice.

Then again, if you didn't get enough nipple action from 300. Rise of an Empire, then this might just be the movie for you.

KAL SHANAHAN

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 7



DIVERGENT

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: NEIL BURGER / SCREENPLAY: EVAN DAUGHERTY, VANESSA TAYLOR / STARRING: SHAILENE WOODLEY, THEO JAMES, ASHLEY JUDD, JAI COURTNEY, KATE WINSLET / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Within the last ten years or so, the number of movies based on books has grown exponentially. Blockbuster franchises like Harry Potter, Twilight and The Hunger Games proved with each successive installment that YA fiction is ridiculously lucrative, causing various studios to jump on the bandwagon and attempt to replicate past successes. Unfortunately, the latest example of this, Divergent, fails to reach Hunger Games status in both success and quality, resulting in a franchise that might be over before it even really starts.

Based on Veronica Roth's runaway bestseller, Divergent centres around Beatrice Prior, a young girl struggling to define herself in a war torn, dystopian world. Following a devastating conflict that wiped out most of the planet, Chicago is divided into five groups, or 'factions', that separate people based on particular qualities or personalities. Beatrice, or 'Tris' as she is christened herself, comes from Abnegation, a faction that prides itself on selflessness and rejection of vanity. During her aptitude test, Beatrice

discovers that she is Divergent, meaning that she doesn't belong in any faction. Divergents are considered a threat by the government and are swiftly executed. Given this, Tris keeps her identity a secret, falling in with Dauntless, the brave faction. Her rigorous training thrusts her into a world of discipline and cruelty, a world that initially appalls her. But when Tris uncovers a horrifying plot by the government to essentially massacre civilians, she must embrace her destiny as a Divergent and stop this heinous crime.

While the film contains some pretty formidable star power, it uses little of it. Shailene Woodley leads a cast that includes Kate Winslet, Miles Teller, Jai Courtney, Theo James, and others, but none of them turn in performances we know they are capable of. The blame can be split two ways. On one hand, director Neil Burger (Limitless) busies himself with building a bleak dystopian society while at the same time pushing aside the story and characters that actually make that society interesting. On the other hand, the actors appear bored, tired, and dull, as if a heavy stupor took hold of them and

suppressed any kind of creative expression. Viewers are likely to share the actors' lethargy, because instead of receiving that exhilarating boost of adrenaline that usually accompanies a good ending, they feel sapped.

Though Burger's misguided direction leaves much to be desired, it does paint a vivid picture of the world Tris is forced to live in. Chicago is brilliantly re-imagined as a derelict city still on the mend from a war that happened decades before. However, as touched upon earlier, Burger wastes too much energy (and money) on building a world without so much as spitting in the direction of the characters that live in it. Our point? World-building doesn't matter if no one cares about the people in it.

Divergent is by no means a good movie, but it does raise some interesting questions and plant the seeds for some very intriguing character dynamics down the line. We just wish some of that had been included here.

HAYDEN MEARS

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 5



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SPARKS

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CHRISTOPHER FOLINO, TODD BURROWS / SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER FOLINO / STARRING: CHASE WILLIAMSON, ASHLEY BELL, CLANCY BROWN, WILLIAM KATT, JAKE BUSEY, CLINT HOWARD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Adapted from Folino's graphic novel of the same name, *Sparks* is a low-budget, gritty, noir superhero story that is a delightful change of pace from the big summer superhero blockbusters that we've become accustomed to. Not to say that those epic extravaganzas are a bad thing, it's just refreshing to see somebody make something so fulfilling for such a relatively small cost – and that is where *Sparks* comes into its own.

Set in the 1940s, the story follows titular hero Ian Sparks (Williamson) in a tangled web of action, romance and atmospheric charm. After a horrific accident leaves Sparks orphaned, we get to see the young hero-in-waiting taking his first baby steps towards protecting the innocent. During this time, we also get to meet Sparks' supportive grandmother (Lynne Marie Stewart) and a concerned police officer, Archer (Brown). Sparks is a hero who has no superpowers to speak of, just the ability to fight the good fight and take one hell of a beating. Starting in his local town, taking down minor thugs, it's not long before Sparks sets his sights on something bigger.

Graduating to the streets of the big city, Sparks begins to team with Lady Heavenly (Bell), a sultry, sexy ass-kicker who quickly becomes

Sparks' significant other. Joined by Sledge (Busey), the team do their best to keep the streets clean, although the apparent reappearance of the twisted, perverted Metanza (Katt) sends Sparks off the deep end, losing everything that he holds dear and sending him down a path of self-destruction. Out to clear his name and erase his demons,

Sparks' story literally unravels before our eyes as he tells his tale to the Daily Chronicle's editor (Howard).

Sparks succeeds where so many bigger budget movies fail – anybody remember *The Spirit*? – in that it manages to balance style and substance. Aesthetically pulling from the likes of *Sin City* and *Watchmen*, the movie is a unique entity. Using low-fi SFX work to give a gritty, rough-around-the-edges feel, Sparks makes the best of what it has. With a well-delivered, intriguing story combined with multi-layered characters and a tone that makes Gotham City's gargoyles look like singing angels, Sparks is the superhero genre's dirty little secret.

Full of great performances from a fantastic cast, particularly the ever-charismatic Clancy Brown, Sparks is as stylish as it is disturbing, and Folino and Burrows' film delivers a villain as sadistic as they come. Throw in a Zimmer-esque score and you have a gem of a film. Whereas other low-budget superhero flicks, such as *All Superheroes Must Die*, often come off as low in quality, Sparks gets the most out of everything at its disposal, creating a massively satisfying and enjoyable movie that's worth hunting down.

Extras: Audio Commentary / *The Making of Sparks* / Deleted Scene.

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++++ 8



STARBURST



FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL (1973)

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TERENCE FISHER / SCREENPLAY: ANTHONY HINDS / STARRING: PETER CUSHING, SHANE BRIANT, MADELINE SMITH, DAVE PROWE, JOHN STRATTON, PATRICK TROUGHTON, BERNARD LEE, CHARLES LLOYD PACK / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 28TH

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell is just another Hammer Horror. Of course, that's exactly what it is, but it's actually a rather interesting one in the context of the Hammer canon. Neither fondly nor well remembered, and seldom seen on TV even in the days when an old Hammer was Saturday's post-pub viewing of choice, this humble horror movie actually represents something of a last

hurrah for a much loved genre.

It was released at a time when most Hammers were unrecognisable from the Gothic origins of *Curse of Frankenstein* (1957). The studio was dabbling in (lame) comedy and (rather good) thrillers. All the horror output seemed to consist of was the sexed-up *Karnstein* trilogy and Big Chris's *Dracula* travails transplanted to groovy '70s London. So the *Curse* trio of Hinds/Fisher/Cushing

were going back to basics with a Frankenstein set in a 19th century lunatic asylum. Dear Lord, there was even less sex in this one than a '50s Hammer. So was it any good? Well, up to a point, yes.

The recently-bereaved Cushing might not look too chipper but he's still in fine form in the role he created and even manages a bit of Van Helsing-esque physical heroics, while Briant is disturbingly good as the handsome yet appropriately-odd Frankenstein acolyte. Smith doesn't get to do too much except stand around looking demure but there's even a cameo from Troughton as an alcoholic grave robber in the cracking cemetery opening. And while we're on the subject of stock Hammer-types, both the asylum staff and inmates are excellent with a good dose of dark humour (even if it's all a bit politically incorrect by today's standards). But it's not perfect Hammer.

There are those of us who reckon the whole Frankenstein story is, frankly, a bit limited and the twists here (brain of a genius; hands of a craftsman; body of a psychopath, in case

you're wondering) had all been done before. Furthermore, the traditionally minuscule Hammer budget shows with an unrecognisable Prowse in a rubber suit as the rubbish monster. Why did he keep getting these weird gigs? The body parts and "Kensington Gore" look good (along with the inexplicable-yet-ever-present spinning-wheel thing in the lab) but the long shots of the asylum use a cardboard model that looks like it was made by the kids in year 3. That wasn't like Hammer; they were always good at hiding the cheapness.

On balance, it's engaging, fun and it really got the atmosphere of classic Hammer at a time when that was often sadly absent. In the end, you really have to love it despite the total absence of Michael Ripper who, one assumes, was unwell that day.

Extras: *Making of / Terence Fisher at Hammer Documentary / Audio commentary / Animated stills gallery*

JOHN KNOTT

+++++++ 8



MURDERDROME

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DANIEL ARMSTRONG / SCREENPLAY: DANIEL ARMSTRONG, LOUISE MONNINGTON, TRENT SCHWARZ / STARRING: KAT ANDERSON, DAISY MASTERMAN, AMBER SAJEN / RELEASE DATE: MAY 12TH

Roller derby has an odd place in the geek culture. It's an internationally popular sport dominated by all-female amateur teams from all walks of life, but despite Hollywood attention, it is regarded by many as not part of the mainstream, bringing with it a sardonic and mocking aesthetic that draws steadily on the worlds of sci-fi, fantasy and horror that sets it apart from less interesting sports.

MurderDrome draws upon this close-knit counter culture

as inspiration to create a marvelously messy and weird little exploitation horror movie. The tale revolves around a band of plucky roller derby girls who, thanks to a cursed artefact, get caught up in the affairs of demonic roller girls who have crawled out of hell itself. Chaos ensues and lots of fake blood gets fountains all over the place. As you might expect, the main characters all have roller derby-style nicknames (Cherry Sky, Trans Em, etc) and this helps lend a cartoon-like quality

to characters, making the entire thing a rather light-hearted if gory movie.

Make no mistake, *MurderDrome* is a truly terrible film. It's poorly directed, badly shot, the pacing is terrible and the plot makes no sense, becoming incoherent at times. It's so low budget that it almost begs for change, though this is part of its charm. However, the actual dialogue is really good. It's filled with quotable lines that, taken out of context, are really funny and clever, it's just that they're delivered poorly by a clearly under-rehearsed cast.

This mix of funny lines, exploitation kitsch and sub-culture setting almost guarantees that it will become

a cult classic. It's not a good movie in the slightest but given that the entire thing cost less to produce than the price of a family car, that's to be expected. If you're a roller derby junkie who likes dumb horror movies with a punk rock and horror aesthetic, or if you're just looking for something to put on in the background after a successful bout then this is likely to make you giggle.

Extras: *Gag reel / Picture in Picture Commentary / VFX / Music videos / "From Parts Unknown" short*

ED FORTUNE

+++++++ 6





WHITE OF THE EYE (1987)

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DONALD CAMMELL / SCREENPLAY: DONALD CAMMELL, CHINA CAMMELL / STARRING: DAVID KEITH, CATHY MORIARTY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Donald Cammell's reputation hinges on just four movies. It's slim pickings, for sure, but the work is distinct and infused not just with a brash, paradoxical absurdity, that mirrored Cammell's own rather bleak view of the world, but also with quirky framing, off-the-wall editing techniques and playful compositions that keep the films' realities constantly in

flux and never settled.

White of the Eye (released in 1987) was the Scottish filmmaker's penultimate effort and an adaptation of the novel Mrs White (1983) by Margaret Tracy. As with the others, shifting identities and a mass of contradictions abound, this time within the filmic study of an insane man. White of the Eye isn't just a serial killer movie, oh no, but a story that

wishes to attain transcendence from generic strictures.

Paul White (Keith) is murdering housewives in and around Tucson, Arizona. His wife, played by Cathy Moriarty, an actress who excels in tough cookie and brassy dame roles, is initially clueless and thinks he's having an affair. Joan White, however, comes to the realisation that her hubby is hiding something much more insidious than an occasional extra-marital tryst.

Paul's reason for killing women isn't just plain old hatred of the female form either – it's cosmically existential; a philosophy that marries misogyny to the strains of Schopenhauerian musings on art and aesthetics. The ghoulish scene in which Paul drowns a victim in a bathtub, holding a mirror to her face so she can see her dying reflection, outdoes anything dished out by Argento in his sadistic pomp.

Arrow Video's dedication to re-releasing cult and forgotten gems is exemplary. This might turn out to be one of the best releases of 2014. The restoration, taken from original

35mm materials and scanned in 2k resolution, was headed by James White at Deluxe Digital Cinema and has retained the kooky stylistic bleached-out effects that might look like accidents or uncorrected mistakes, but were very much part of the photographic conception devised by the director, Larry McConkey (cinematographer) and Alan Jones (lighting cameraman).

The extras are meaty and in-depth. There's the inclusion, too, of the 1998 BBC documentary about Cammell's career and life. He committed suicide in 1996, at the age of 62, leaving behind at least one highly regarded classic (Performance, 1970) and three cult pictures.

Extras: Deleted Scenes / Audio Commentary / Into The White featurette / Restoration comparison / Booklet / Donald Cammell – The Ultimate Performance feature-length documentary / Alternate Credits / The Argument short

MARTYN CONTERIO

+++++ 9



THE PROFESSIONALS: MK1

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / STARRING: GORDON JACKSON, MARTIN SHAW, LEWIS COLLINS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A massive hit when it debuted in 1977, this classic piece of cult TV gets an astonishing HD makeover thanks to Network.

Bodie (Collins) and Doyle (Shaw) are two hard-hitting agents of C15, an elite force who are above the police and work outside their boundaries. Headed by George Cowley (Jackson), they attempt to stop terrorists and high-profile murderers by any means possible.

It's easy to see why the show was such a success, the fast moving, uncomplicated plots and likeable leads make for

fun viewing. Not every episode is a classic, and as would be expected with the format, the 'threats' are dealt with in a timely manner, quite often ending with a three-shot of the leads having a good old laugh over a single malt. Created by Brian Clemens (who also wrote many of the episodes, and had previously co-created '60s hit The Avengers) it is, effectively, a heightened reality (one episode even has an assassin fire a rifle at a range of 2 miles) of shows like The Sweeney. But while those were grounded within the realms

of the law, the 'no bureaucracy' angle of the fictional C15 allows the leads to be as brutal as the villains they face. The yin and yang of Bodie and Doyle (one an ex-SAS mercenary, the other a former beat bobbie) gives just the right amount of friction between the team. Jackson's Cowley – quite a different character to what TV audiences had been used to him playing – is just as bad-ass as his recruits, not afraid to get his hands dirty himself if needs be. Throughout this first series (we didn't call them seasons back then) there's a wealth of brilliant British character actors popping up, from the likes of David Suchet and Roger Lloyd Pack to Diane Keen (ask your dad) and the performances are always of a high standard, even the oft-criticised Collins is not as wooden as people say.

As is often the case with vintage TV, there is occasionally some jaw-dropping casual sexism, and in Klammen, an episode pulled from the original broadcast, some racist behaviour which makes for very uncomfortable viewing. That episode aside, it's never too violent, and the sight of the team rolling around on the floor

and throwing themselves over car bonnets in their tight-fitting trousers while funky wakka-wakka music is played is more likely to raise a smile than offend. The fact it spawned several tie-in annuals and even a comic strip in the short lived Look-In rip-off Tops is testament to its 'family' appeal. And the theme tune is still fantastic.

Network's restoration of the original negatives (made possible by the practice of shooting '70s drama shows on 16mm film) is superb, breathing new life into the image, and giving it a 'just filmed' look (fashions notwithstanding), and the sound is clear as a bell, in both the original mono and new 5.1 mix.

Extras: Exclusive book / All episodes feature original Assault Course titles, and are presented in their original production order / Brand-new Dolby 5.1 mixes / Without Walls documentary / HD image galleries / Raw title sequence, original ad bumper and series two titles demo / Additional footage / PDF material

MARTIN UNSWORTH

+++++ 8



LORD OF ILLUSIONS (1995)

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: CLIVE BARKER / SCREENPLAY: CLIVE BARKER
STARRING: SCOTT BAKULA, KEVIN J. O'CONNOR, FAMKE JANSSEN, BARRY DEL SHERMAN, DANIEL VON BARGEN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After his success with *Hellraiser* and *Nightbreed*, Barker adapted and elaborated on his short story *The Last Illusion* with this great film from the mid-'90s, finally available in HD.

Weary private detective Harry D'Amour (Bakula), recovering from his last case which involved an exorcism, is hired for what seems like the relatively simple task of accompanying a lady named Dorothea (Janssen) to a

performance by her husband, the stage magician Philip Swann (O'Connor). During his new routine, however, there's a terrible accident and Swann is killed. Meanwhile, the Swanns' past is coming back to haunt them as powerful black magician Nix (von Borgen), killed by Dorothea thirteen years earlier when Swann and his friends rescued her from his cult, is attempting a resurrection. It's down to psychotic sorcerer Butterfield

(Sherman) to find out from Dorothea where Nix's body is buried by any means necessary.

A marvellous blend of horror, Grand Guignol and detective story, *Lord of Illusions* draws the viewer into a complex web of deceit, murder and magic. Bakula is an amiable lead, just laid back enough to have the Philip Marlowe style, yet not averse to a bit of rough and tumble – even if it's in the sack with the recently widowed Dorothea (whose mourning suit seems to be a diaphanous pink dress). While not as gory as the *Hellraiser* films, it certainly doesn't hold back and there are several splatter-filled moments, although the early CGI is put to shame by the brilliant practical effects.

The standout, however, is Sherman's sadistic and terrifying portrayal of Butterfield. Odd-looking and unrelentingly nasty, he is a character of nightmares, and that's not just his way too-tight trousers!

The director's cut (which is twelve minutes longer) is also included, but only on DVD, and the quality dip is noticeable, with some scenes particularly soft. Which is a shame, not only because the theatrical version

on the Blu-ray is so clear, but because this version is more enjoyable, expanding on the characterisation and making it more coherent. The director's cut also includes an interesting commentary from Barker, who points out the differences in the two versions, as well as the filmmaking process and the mechanics of the plot. There are no extras on the Blu-ray, nor are there the deleted scenes and trailer which appeared on the earlier release.

Extras: See above

MARTIN UNSWORTH

+++++ 8



BLOOD C: THE LAST DARK

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NAOYOSHI SHOITANA / SCREENPLAY: JUNICHI FUJISAKU, NANASE OKAWA / STARRING: ATSUSHI ABE, MASUMI ASANO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

What started with *Blood: The Last Vampire* is brought to a close with *Blood-C: The Last Dark*, which has the unenviable task of being labelled both sequel and concluding chapter. If the word sequel is enough to chill the blood, then the tainting of so many of our beloved shows in their closing moments is capable of practically freezing it in our veins.

In the concluding chapter of the *Blood* series, our heroine Saya sets out on her quest

for vengeance against Fumito Nanahara. But this time she finds allies in a group of young people known as the *Surat*, who have banded together to oppose the oppressive Youth Ordinance Bill. Whilst Saya prepares for her final battle, behind the scenes Machiavellian plays are at work that threaten her journey.

Blood-C: The Last Dark is a perfectly adequate sequel and even a decent enough standalone film that can serve

as an introduction to Saya's world. However, as with all things, it is advised to observe the chronological order and view it as the sequel to the *Blood-C* series it is intended to be.

Visually electric, Production I.G. stand as the heroes of the film, but like most things in life, endings are rarely perfect. In spite of any shortcomings of the film, Saya's character manages to escape the clutches of imperfection to exit on a high. Despite revealing more sides to herself here, she remains a unique and reclusive individual who walks to the beat of her own drum, and most importantly retains an air of mystery.

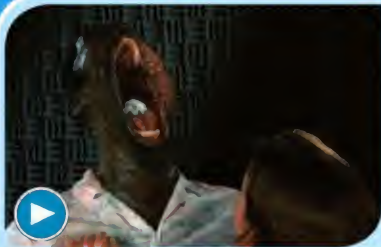
While the near-perfect *Blood: The Last Vampire* came in at a snappy 50 minutes, just an hour shy of the less than perfect *The Last Dark*, up until now the rule of the *Blood* series has been to keep it short and sweet. Sauntering along with a visual flair and a mysterious Saya to hold our hand, the conclusion of the *Blood* series feels, by comparison, a little lacklustre, teasing us with a potentially interesting conclusion but one that just struggles to deliver.

Extras: None

PAUL RISKER

+++++ 6





THE STUFF (1985)

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: LARRY COHEN / SCREENPLAY: LARRY COHEN / STARRING: MICHAEL MORIARTY, ANDREA MARCOVICCI, GARRETT MORRIS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the likes of *It's Alive*, *God Told Me To* and *Q – The Winged Serpent* under his belt, Larry Cohen has ever been the master of high concept. A highly addictive mass-marketed dessert that takes over your mind and eats you from the inside? Sold! But if you know Cohen, you'll also know that this was never going to be quite the ride you were expecting it to be.

In a characteristically eccentric performance, Cohen's preferred leading man Moriarty plays a sacked FBI agent turned industrial saboteur extraordinaire nicknamed Mo (because when people give me money, I always want mo) who's hired by a shady consortium of dessert tycoons to find out what exactly the Stuff is and halt production, before its unprecedented

popularity puts all their asses out of business. Teaming up with Jason (Scott Bloom), a young boy who's lost his family to Stuff addiction, and Nicole (Marcovicci), the deadly dessert's head ad exec until she witnesses its effects, Mo gradually discovers the gruesome extent of the threat the Stuff poses to mankind, with results in equal portions horrific and hilarious.

Yep, this is every bit as cheesy as it sounds, and Cohen absolutely revels in it. So should you. From the ultra-'80s Stuff TV ads, to Paul Sorvino leading a comedy right-wing private army against a mass of gelatinous white goo, you just never know exactly where this unbinged narrative is going to go next. But despite being so off the wall, *The Stuff* also plays today as the quintessential American '80s horror flick, encapsulating all their throwaway silliness and bravura splatter tendencies (albeit with white goo replacing the usual claret) in one barking mad 92 minute swoop.

Of course, the film's satirical message – on how massive multinationals keep themselves

stinking rich by selling us products that addict and slowly kill us – is just as pertinent today as it was then. A scene where we clearly see a McDonald's right next to where a dedicated *Stuff* kiosk has been blown to smithereens serves to remind us how nothing has really changed in this respect.

So go and get some Stuff into your life today – "Enough is never enough!"

Extras: 'Can't Get Enough of The Stuff' Documentary / Darren Bousman Trailer commentary / Original trailer

ROB TALBOT

+++++ 8



WAKE IN FRIGHT (1971)

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: TED KOTCHEFF / SCREENPLAY: EVAN JONES / STARRING: GARY BOND, DONALD PLEASANCE, CHIPS RAFFERTY, SYLVIA KAY, JACK THOMPSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A 1971 Australian classic, *Wake in Fright* is almost a dirty little secret of cinema. Adapted from Kenneth Cook's 1961 novel of the same name, the film made its world premiere at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival, nominated for the prestigious Palme d'Or. After a badly handled US theatrical run, it then fell off the radar, not even garnering a VHS or DVD release. Now, thanks to some extreme digging and restoration work, *Wake in Fright*

is set to get the attention and praise that it deserves.

The story focuses on John Grant (Bond), a very British teacher who is teaching in the Australian outback. Tied to a contract that he cannot afford to pay his way out of, Grant looks down on his surroundings. When a planned trip to Sydney sees him having to spend a night in the mining town of Bundanyabba, his life begins to change before his eyes. One night turns to five,

and, before he knows it, he's submerged in an alcohol-infused milieu of gambling, hunting and 'mateship' – a world that he detests. By the time the movie comes to a close, Grant finds himself becoming what he hates, stranded in a world where he has no future and his best option could be staring back at him from the chamber of his rifle.

A stunningly surreal film, *Wake in Fright* is covered by a warm hue throughout, as this brand new restoration gives off enough heat and humidity from the Australian outback to have you reach for the suntan lotion. Equally as striking are the performances on show. John Grant is absolutely note-perfect as the stiff-upper-lipped Englishman stranded in an environment that he couldn't be any further removed from. Engulfed by a batch of characters that down pints as easy as fat kids devour Chicken McNuggets, Grant is great as the rose surrounded by thorns. One particular 'thorn' is the always-entertaining Donald Pleasance as Doc, an apparent doctor whose picnic

is completely devoid of any sandwiches whatsoever. For those of you only familiar with Pleasance as Sam Loomis in the Halloween movies, this role amps the crazed nature of that role up to 11.

We can't say enough great things about this release and the extras are plentiful and rewarding. That said, there are some certain scenes that are very, very disturbing, involving footage of real kangaroos being slain. Kotcheff was strongly encouraged by The Royal Australian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to use as much real footage as possible in order to highlight the day-to-day issues surrounding the slaughter of kangaroos. These scenes are truly disturbing but if you can take them for the statement they were intended to make, *Wake in Fright* is a must-have.

Extras: Audio Commentary / Four Featurettes / TV Spot / Trailer / 48-page booklet

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 9



THE NEW (INCOMPLETE) COMPLETE AND UTTER HISTORY OF BRITAIN

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: MAURICE MURPHY / SCREENPLAY: MICHAEL PALIN, TERRY JONES / STARRING: MICHAEL PALIN, TERRY JONES, RODDY MAUDE-ROXB, COLIN GORDON, JOHNNY VYVYAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Screened in January 1969, just nine months before the debut of the groundbreaking Monty Python's Flying Circus and never aired nationally (being produced by and screened only in the region then known as London Weekend Television), *The Complete and Utter History of Britain* is very much Python in embryo. The natural accompaniment to earlier free-form comedy shows such as *Do Not Adjust Your Set*

and *At Last The 1948 Show*, Britain (as we shall call it for the sake of brevity) establishes the style of offbeat, surreal and slightly slapstick comedy which the Python series would later refine and fine-tune. Here, Pythons-to-be Palin and Jones work with the core idea of important historical events viewed through the imaginary prism of contemporary television coverage, using still-popular sensationalistic

reporting techniques. William the Conqueror is interviewed post-Hastings in a football team's communal bath, Rome's first incursions into England are displayed as larky holiday home videos and more traditional sketches depict Stone Age man's attempts to patent the first chair and Palin's wily estate agent espousing the virtues of draughty Stonehenge as a first home for a pair of newlyweds: "It's got character, charm – and a slab in the middle."

Only two episodes of Britain exist – and even on Blu-ray the quality is pretty ropey – so it's hard to get a feeling for how the series might have developed across its six episodes (seven were recorded but LWT demanded that the first two were amalgamated into one episode because they weren't funny enough). Even from the two which remain, however, it's easy to see what works and what doesn't. Palin and Jones bring the same wide-eyed enthusiasm and versatility they'd bring to Python, though Colin Gordon as the 'narrator' is an uneasy fit, slowing down

the proceedings and looking distinctly uncomfortable. The highlight of the remaining footage, though, is Roddy Maude-Roxby as dotty Professor Weaver, a clueless and clumsy resident history expert whose meandering monologues descend into a series of fitfully funny mannerisms and well-observed sight gags.

Network have done an admirable job in turning a massively incomplete TV series into a worthwhile purchase, but even without the comprehensive bonus material, Britain is an important release because it's pretty much the last step on the road which would lead to Monty Python.

Extras: Episode footage presented with new, original linking material from Palin and Jones / Interview with producer Humphrey Barclay / The two episodes as transmitted and recorded / Film insert material / Collector's booklet / Picture gallery

PAUL MAUNT

+++++ 7



STALLED

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: CHRISTIAN JAMES / SCREENPLAY: DAN PALMER / STARRING: DAN PALMER, ANTONIA BERNATH, TAMARYN PAYNE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If there's one thing fright film fans really don't need – apart from more found footage features, obviously – it's another British comedy zombie movie. Seriously, after *Shaun of the Dead* and *Cockneys vs. Zombies*, what more is there to say from a UK perspective? *Stalled*, written by and starring Dan Palmer and set almost entirely in a toilet cubicle, isn't anywhere near the same league as its two more illustrious

predecessors, but by the same token isn't as vacant as it might first appear and is actually, on occasion, reasonably engaging.

Palmer plays seedy office janitor W.C. (see what they did there?) who finds himself trapped in a toilet cubicle when a zombie apocalypse inexplicably starts during the Christmas party. As the bathroom fills up with more and more shuffling zombies and his desperate attempts to

escape all go down the pan, W.C. realises that someone else is stuck in the cubicle two doors down. He strikes up a not-especially-funny dialogue with Heather (Bernath) and becomes more determined than ever to escape a situation which is, very probably, driving him around the bend. But Heather isn't quite what he expects and the zombies are getting more and more determined...

Stalled isn't especially funny. There's nothing much going on in the way of jokes or witty banter but Palmer just about makes up for it with an interesting line in physical and facial comedy. His long confessional chat with Heather has a forced artificiality about it and it's not long before the cramped and restrictive location runs out of both comedic and dramatic potential and just becomes tedious. But on the plus side, the zombie make-up is decent, there's some imaginative gore and the final scene – W.C. flushed with the excitement of freedom and determined to make amends to his family – opens up the film in ways that just make you wish *Stalled* had had the

budget to be a bit bigger a bit sooner. Top marks for trying something different and very nearly pulling it off, but when your best gag is your tagline – when there's no bathroom left in Hell – then you've got problems with your comedy.

Stalled might float your boat if you're after a zombie film that's at least a bit different and it might be worth a visit even if it's bound to end up in the bowels of your DVD collection. [Is that the best you can do? Crap! - Ed.]

Extras: Behind the scenes footage / Trailer / Storyboard comparisons / Two commentaries

PAUL MAUNT

+++++ 5





BLIND WOMAN'S CURSE (1970)

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TERUO ISHII / SCREENPLAY: TERUO ISHII, CHUSEI SONE / STARRING: MEIKO KAJI, HOKI TOKUDA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Arrow Films have made quite the name for themselves re-releasing cult not-quite-classics for a modern audience, beautifully packaged and laden with special features. It's brought us such gems as *Deranged*, *The Stuff and White of the Eye*, among many more. Truly, we are living in the golden age of cult fandom. As odd as anything they've ever brought us so far is *Blind Woman's*

Curse, a supernaturally-tinged Japanese Yakuza film, with an added touch of horror and erotica for good measure. It is, frankly, bizarre.

When gang leader Akemi slashes out the eyes of an opponent during a battle with gangland rivals, a sinister black cat appears to lap up the blood and set the titular curse in motion. Akemi is now cursed; doomed to watch her

minions die, one by one before her, their dragon tattoos peeled off and licked by the Blind Woman's grudge-holding kitty and ghostly shadow-dwelling hunchback.

A forbearer to the work of Takashi Miike and Quentin Tarantino, *Blind Woman's Curse* is a thoroughly enjoyable oddity. It seamlessly (and at other times, not so seamlessly) crosses genres without pause for thought. It's always effective, the horror and the humour working just as effectively as the crime drama and the erotica. It's bound to put off or annoy some, but plenty more will love it for its bizarre sensibilities.

Crude and juvenile as it sometimes might be (we could do without the repeated flashing of its villain's stink of speedo-clad, apparently stinky arse cheeks), the story is always gripping, its shocks frequently effective and vividly depicted. The more surreal horror imagery works best; most notably during a stage show in which our Blind Woman reclines with her kitty while a hunchback tramp alternately licks and washes her bare feet. If the film rambles

on a bit, it is forgivable, since everything else it does is so enjoyable and original. Kinky, weird, scary and funny in equal measures, *Blind Woman's Curse* is an excellent re-release of a true cult gem that many won't even know existed in the first place. Some will overlook it due to its age and subtitles (shame on you) but those who do give it a chance should find much to enjoy. Even better, old fans and horror aficionados can bask in its all-new high definition glory. The Blind Woman and her curse have never looked better.

As you'd expect from Arrow, the film comes accompanied by a whole host of extras, including an audio commentary by Japanese film expert Jasper Sharp and a lovely looking collector's booklet. Gorgeous to look at and utterly bonkers to boot, *Blind Woman's Curse* is the cat's whiskers.

Extras: Commentary / Trailer reel / Booklet

JOEL HARLEY

+++++ 9



AIRWOLF - THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

BD + DVD / CERT: 12 / STARRING: JAN-MICHAEL VINCENT, ERNEST BORGNINE, ALEX CORD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

For those of you not lucky enough to grow up in the '80s, *Airwolf* is a cold-war era action adventure drama centred around a high-tech vehicle and its plucky crew. Whereas its imitators such as *Knight Rider* and *Street Hawk* were essentially cop shows with a silly high-tech twiddle, *Airwolf* was a spy-fi thriller. Its main characters are gritty, broken people who do what they can in a world gone mad. They're a plucky team of veteran professionals who save the world again and

again, despite their wounds and differences. Stringfellow Hawke (the show's main protagonist) is the very model of brave yet deep, whereas his comrade in arms Dom Santini provides comic relief by being Sancho Panza to Hawke's Don Quixote. It's a classic '80s-style pairing and a memorable one at that.

Nostalgia seekers should be aware that the show is very much of its time; the pacing is much slower than modern thrillers and the plots are quite samey in places. This should not

put you off however; they simply don't make shows like this any more. Without *Airwolf*, there would have been no shows like *JAG* or *NCIS* – this is the granddaddy of modern American espionage series.

Being a complete collection, the good is lumped in with the not-so-good. That means we get dull 'disaster movie' clunkers like *Flight #093 Is Missing* mixed in with *Bond*-like stories such as *Horn of Plenty* and cop show style thriller *Sweet Britches*.

Airwolf: The Complete Collection: Seasons 1-3 is interestingly titled. It only contains the first three seasons of the show. There is a fourth season of *Airwolf* and its absence may seem a bit odd to those not in the know. However, it's universally disliked by fans of the series; the fourth season is a low budget take on the whole thing, with a different cast and storyline, pretty much being *Airwolf* in name only. Given that some refuse to acknowledge

its existence, it's easy to see why the last and least season has to be acquired separately. Another thing missing from this boxed set is anything in the way of extras; we get some cast biographies, some series notes and not much else. If you've gotten to the end of this review without humming the theme tune then this box set might not be for you. Those of you who are, however, will love this blast from the past.

Extras: Cast bios / Notes

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8





THE LAST KEEPERS

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: MAGGIE GREENWALD / SCREENPLAY: PETER HUTCHINGS, CHRISTINA MENGERT / STARRING: ZOSIA MAMET, AIDAN QUINN, VIRGINIA MADSEN, OLYMPIA DUKAKIS / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 21ST

About ten minutes into *The Last Keepers*, it becomes blindingly obvious that this is not a movie aimed at jaded, aged film reviewing hacks. This is, in fact, a movie aimed at slightly rebellious teenage girls who quite fancy the idea of going off the straight and narrow but probably won't if it's all the same to you. And that's okay. With its decent cast, sharp (if occasionally sappy) script and warm cinematography, it's an easy-on-the-eye movie which

passes eighty-odd minutes agreeably enough even though you might feel the need to go out and out-stare a puppy when it's over just to reassert your maturity or, in this reviewer's case, your masculinity.

Zosia Mamet (I had one, but the wheel fell off) plays quirky, arty Rhea Calver, who lives with her quirky, arty parents and her quirky, arty gran and she, like, just doesn't fit in with all the other kids in school. This might be because she wears

ghastly frocks which look like exploded lampshades and has geeky friends. Her classmates snicker and sneer but softe Simon (Sam Underwood) has a crush on her and woos her with terrible self-written poetry. Rhea is just coming to terms with the fact that someone outside her family likes her when she's hit by the bombshell that she's actually the latest in a family line of witches and that she's set to inherit the powers of her ma and gran which she, as a 'chosen one', will use for the good of Mankind. Rhea tells Simon, who blabs it to the school and, before long, she's an outcast again for all sorts of reasons. Rejecting her destiny, she squeezes into a tight skirt, starts flirting with a bad boy and goes to illicit booze parties. No good can come of this, you might think; but fortunately when she's faced with a situation where she can use her powers for the greater good, Rhea discovers the power of love, the importance of family and that there is a reason for all things – even magicky things.

The *Last Keepers* is the very definition of a light and inoffensive thing and there's not a house in the land that would find anything even remotely disturbing here. But that's not the point of it. It's a slightly racey fantasy romance for slightly older kids and whilst it's undeniably anodyne to the point of sickliness it's still hugely less offensive and button-pushing than stuff like the *Twilight* saga and can be happily recommended for teenagers of a curious disposition.

Extras: None

PAUL MOUNT

+++++ 5



SEVEN SAMURAI (1954)

BD + DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: AKIRA KUROSAWA / SCREENPLAY: AKIRA KUROSAWA, SHINOBU HASHIMOTO, HIDEO OGUNI / STARRING: TAKASHI SHIMURA, ISAO KIMURA, YOSHIO INABA, DAISUKE KATO, MINORU CHIAKI, SEIJI MIYAGUCHI, Toshirō Mifune / RELEASED: APRIL 21ST

In 1954 Japan's Toho Studios produced a groundbreaking movie. Western cinema had inspired it but the film returned the favour by becoming a massive influence in the West. But you might be surprised to learn that at no point did it feature the destruction of Tokyo by an oversize reptile.

Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) is an epic story set in the late 16th century and dealing with the rigid divisions

in Japanese society by way of a rollicking adventure. Villagers under threat from marauding bandits decide to hire samurai for protection even though all they have to offer is rice. But at a time of continual civil war, a masterless samurai from a defeated clan was common and social conventions prevented him from taking work outside the traditions of his warrior caste. These 'ronin' often became bandits exactly like

those threatening the village but others went hungry and it is from this group our villagers recruit, one by one, their prospective saviours.

Recruiting a team of disparate characters to carry out a mission is a standard trope today in anything from *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) to *The Monuments Men* (2014) but, movie historians would have you believe, it started here. Even our introduction to the group's leader, Kambei (Shimura), in which he saves a kidnapped child by subterfuge and skilful violence represents the start of that Bond-esque tradition of meeting our hero embroiled in another adventure irrelevant from the main plot. But who cares about all this "influence" nonsense? That's not a good enough reason to watch it. Is it any good? Dear Lord, yes.

Movies like this make the reviewer's job rather difficult because lists of superlatives and cries that "they nailed it" aren't very informative. But despite making many more samurai flicks, Kurosawa aged it first time. This latest (and very good) print from the BFI is just shy of four hours but

you won't notice the length. Kurosawa seems to delight in the conventions he's just created and keeps it tight until he blows you away with action scenes that could be out of *Saving Private Ryan*. With the samurai's detailed defence planning and Kurosawa's use of multiple cameras and depth of field, we can tell exactly what's going on in what could easily be confusing sequences. Half a million was a big budget back then and the use of non-studio locations adds to the feeling of authenticity. From now on all climatic battles would be fought in the mud.

We suspect there are two groups out there: Those who haven't seen *Seven Samurai* but have heard it's good; and those who have seen it and know it's good. You need to join the second group. Believe the hype.

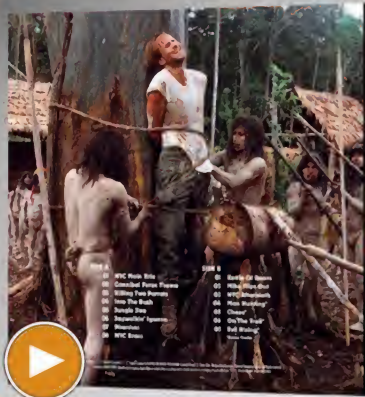
Extras: Original Japanese theatrical trailer / *The Art of Akira Kurosawa* (2013, 48 mins) / Fully illustrated 16-page booklet with essays and credits

JOHN KNOTT

+++++++ 10

OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



Expect One Way Static's **Cannibal Ferox** soundtrack to blow minds when it starts shipping on April 28th. Whether you've ordered the standard black vinyl edition or special "unrated" vinyl (with artwork that may cause "traumatising shocks") on jungle camouflage or clear and transparent green split vinyl, you should be excited about the Belgian label's version of the Roberto Donati score. Whichever version you get, the soundtrack comes packaged in a deluxe old school gatefold tip-on jacket with insert, and contains four extra bonus tracks not included in the original score.

New label Poisoned Mind Records is run by Mike Paine and Tom Rogers, and is based out of New Jersey and Connecticut in the United States. Their first release, a 7-inch featuring the soundtrack to Chester Turner's insane straight-to-video cult film **Black Devil Doll**, sold out in less than 24 hours. As if that wasn't enough, their next release will be another Turner soundtrack, this time to his anthology film, **Tales from the Quadead Zone**.

When asked why Turner's films, Rogers said, "Chester's films just have a special aura about them to us. These films were made during the VHS boom

and just the aesthetics of the music and films being shot on video and DIY – that is what Poisoned Mind Records is about. His films are magical in their own way and we realise they aren't for everybody, but we are huge fans of his movies and music and obviously there are a lot of people out there who feel the same way."

In addition to their **Quadead Zone** soundtrack, Poisoned Mind is working on their first band release, from Texas-based doom metal band Crypt Trip. Both releases should come out sometime this summer, says Rogers, but it should be worth the wait: "All of our soundtrack releases will be something different for the fans. We plan on doing something bigger and better each time! All the money goes right back into the next releases to bring something special to the fans like we did with the **Black Devil Doll** hand puppet. Expect the **Tales from the Quadead** soundtrack release to blow your mind!"

Waxwork Records' next release was leaked last month, and **The Warriors** is scheduled for later this year. It'll be a massive 2xLP set, and it's the full, never-released, Barry De Vorzon film score. The label launched pre-orders for **Creepshow** on April 1, with art by Ghoulish Gary Pullin. In addition to all of the tracks

being re-mixed and re-mastered for vinyl from the original master tapes, the LP comes in a heavyweight casebound tip-on gatefold jacket with a satin coating. The liner notes feature essays from director George Romero and composer John Harrison. Plus, the label's pressing five different variants of the album, each corresponding to the different stories in the film. I can't decide if I like the *Father's Day* version of cake icing vinyl with blood clot splatter or the "meteor shit" transparent green for *The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verill* better.





Analog Planet reported that Wendy Carlos's *Tron* soundtrack is coming as a 180-gram double LP from Audio Fidelity, and it's been confirmed by label head Marshall Blonstein. Also, Audio Fidelity announced they'll be halting the production of their 24K gold CDs, due to issues with manufacturing delays caused by difficulty procuring the gold necessary to make them. After "a lot of thought and realistic evaluation of market conditions," the company will only be making hybrid SACD and 180-gram vinyl LPs from now on.

If you've had trouble getting records from Berlin / Vienna label Giallo Disco Records, fret no longer. All orders will be handled professionally from now on by Townsend Music in London. This is just in time for the label's next release, Unit Black Flight's *Tracks from the Trailer EP*. As per usual for the label, it'll come on 12-inch black vinyl, and the EP consists of remastered cuts from the 2012, digital-only release, plus a special remix from Minimal Rome's Heinrich Dressel.

The digital version includes bonus remixes from Giallo Disco's Vercetti Technicolor and Antoni Maiorvi. The music is described as "the sound of one man's weapons upgrade montage as he prepares to escape Indianapolis and heads ol' Californy-Way." If you've had chance to hear it before, you know what an amazing piece of work it is, rocking a retro-'80s vibe fans of the *Drive* soundtrack or Italians Do It Better will adore. Maiorvi's remix of *Shortwave Radio Antenna Down* is a true dancefloor banger.

Speaking of faux soundtracks, United States indie-electronic artist and rapper Rjyan Kidwell – better known as Cex – put out what might be the tightest release in terms of both music and concept yet on the first of the month. The *Shamaneater* album is not only an excellent soundtrack to a non-existent video game, featuring music that runs the gamut from banging electronica to dreamy loops, the packaging continues the idea. The physical version of *Shamaneater* comes in recycled generic GameStop jackets with a printout of the GameFAQ walkthrough. It's so legitimate a concept that there's a warning from label Automation Records when you order: "PLEASE NOTE: The recycled PS2 cases may or may not have the memory

card holder and/or have old price tags and other varying signs of wear."

If you missed out on getting the vinyl release for Ben Wheatley's excellently trippy masterpiece *A Field in England*, fear not. While the vinyl has long since sold out, and now commands what might be considered insane prices on the secondary market, you can now snag the soundtrack through digital outlets like iTunes and Amazon. Be forewarned, however, as the Amazon version is cheaper, it doesn't include the Black Mass track, *Chernobyl*. Both versions do, however, feature a full-album mix track as a bonus when you buy the full soundtrack.

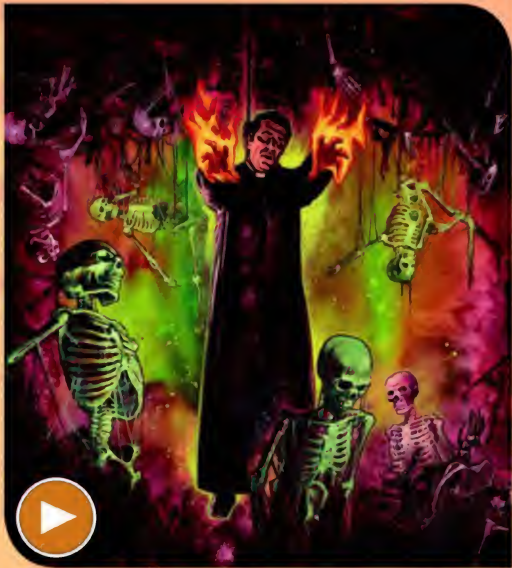
In news of further dual releases, Death Waltz announced their vinyl version of Fabio Frizzi's *City of the Living Dead* score, due out this month, with the remastering overseen by Frizzi himself. Their release will feature art by Graham Humphreys, and previews another future Death Waltz recording by including as its finale a 10-minute live suite of music from the Frizzi 2 Fulci live concert Death Waltz helped throw in London last Halloween. Both the *City of the Living Dead* score and Frizzi live album will see release on Compact Disc through Beat Records, in addition to Death Waltz's vinyl.

Death Waltz's version comes fresh on the heels of Italian label Stella issuing a red vinyl limited edition of 300 copies

last month. Stella's edition sports the original poster art to the Lucio Fulci film, and comes with two posters, in addition to several alternate takes as unreleased bonus tracks. The label's also released another Donato soundtrack, to Umberto Lenzi's cannibal predecessor to *Cannibal Ferox*, *Eaten Alive!* That album is limited to 250 copies, on green vinyl and is padded out with a few *Cannibal Ferox* tracks on the B-side.

Lastly, we have two new releases from obscurity powerhouse Finders Keepers. First up is the label's fourth installment in their series of unreleased music by Polish composer Andrzej Korzynski. Out earlier this month on vinyl was the soundtrack to Andrzej Wajda's 1977 Polish film *Man of Marble* by 'national filmmaker' and long-term collaborator. Issued on vinyl for the first time, this album contains exclusive unreleased bonus tracks, and the label refers to it as "synthesizer-fueled [...] Polish cosmic disco."

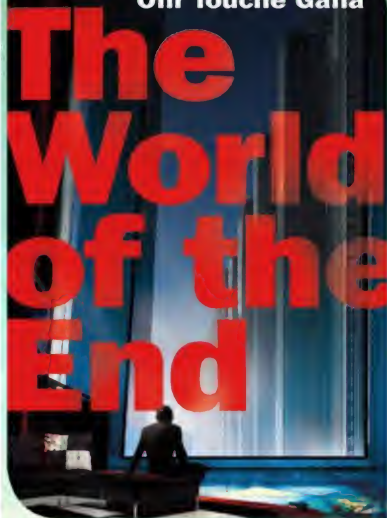
Finders Keepers also put out a strictly limited edition of 500 vinyl copies for Sergio Martino's 1972 giallo, *All the Colours of the Dark*, with music by Bruno Nicolai. This edition has tracks previously unavailable on vinyl, but extant on CD as part of Digitmovies's "Bruno Nicolai in Giallo" series, such as *Evocazione*, *Magico Incontro*, *Bambole*, and others.



BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS

Ofir Touché Gafla



IF WHAT DREAMS MAY COME and BEETLEJUICE had a baby, it might look something like this...

After Ben Mendelsohn's wife Marian dies under "bizarre aeronautical circumstance", he puts a gun in his mouth. When he wakes up, naked and whole, he discovers that he's in the Other World, an eternal afterlife where all of history is open to you, the laws of physics are negotiable, and Marilyn Monroe could be living in the flat next door. But this world is missing something, and when Ben can't find his wife he enlists the help of family and friends and a Welsh detective

to find her. Is she hiding? Is she looking for family? And was her death truly an accident? Ben desperately hopes to find out.

Originally published in Hebrew in 2004 (and translated into English in 2013), Ofir Touché Gafla's first novel is an interesting one. The afterlife is old territory for writers; they've explored its various permutations, from the Greco-Roman underworld to the Christian *Inferno* to the heaven and hell that has no

basis in religion, and in recent years this has taken a more wry turn. Instead of utopias or hellish landscapes we have the eternal bureaucracy of the aforementioned *Beetlejuice*, an afterlife of blindingly difficult manuals and waiting rooms and paperwork. Or the personally tailored heaven of *The Lovely Bones* and *What Dreams May Come*, an afterlife the soul can create to suit itself. In *The World of the End*, Gafla gives us an afterlife that is a continuation of the life the soul has left: apartments and tapes and mobile phone-like communicators; trams and jobs and cafés. Death is not the end, Gafla has decided, but rather the beginning of a new (and surprisingly secular) chapter.

All this world building is helped by uncomplicated prose and a pretty great translation, although it isn't perfect (but I'll get to that later). The story itself is fascinating and engaging, and the mystery of Marian's location keeps you guessing until the very end. Strengthening this mystery are some fascinating discussions on life, death and love, the latter being of utmost concern. Love, the novel says, is complicated, manifesting itself in many forms: romantic, platonic, familial; healthy, obsessive, stalwart. It is the novel's driving force, influencing the actions and encounters of every single character, in life and after it, and their beliefs about love are constantly challenged. As are those of the readers, as the different attitudes cause us to question our own beliefs about love: Is it transformative? Do we all need it? Is it something to be wary of? Is it a positive force or a negative one? And does it really, truly, conquer all? Frankly, I'm not even sure the novel knows.

As I said, this book isn't perfect. Occasionally the language can get a bit

verbose, a contrast to the relative linguistic simplicity of the majority of the book, and I can't decide if this is a fault with the translation or the text itself. The interconnectedness of the characters is also flawed; while an absence of extraneous characters does make for good plotting, connecting ninety percent of the characters reads as a bit too coincidental. The cast of characters is large and diverse, spread over two worlds and two continents, and linking them all feels unrealistically neat. As for the mystery, while it is engaging, it does have its moments of frustration and predictability. Clues as to Marian's whereabouts are discovered through Ben, as he both intentionally and unintentionally keeps information about her from his detective, a technique that feels a bit forced. After the initial panic, wouldn't he want to give the detective as many details as possible? Wouldn't it be more logical for him to spout her entire life story instead of giving the detective nothing to go on? Although, this might have made it even easier for readers to suss out the solution, as I did partway through the book. Figuring out a mystery before the protagonist does have its narrative rewards, but it can also leave you disappointed that the text was unable to keep you completely fooled.

Ultimately, *The World of the End* is a book that feels wanting. While it's a good story, and a good translation, there is something missing that keeps it from being a really great book, although I can't put my finger on what it is. Regardless, if you want to read some Israeli genre fiction, and see a unique picture of the afterlife, I would certainly give it a read. But a warning: if you're triggered by rape, suicide, pedophilia or overt violence, tread carefully. +



SHEER FILTH

EDITED BY: DAVID FLINT
PUBLISHER: FAB PRESS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Every now and then a book comes along that provides a perfect snapshot of an era. Published between 1987 and 1989, the fanzine *Sheer Filth* offered a potent mix of bizarre and transgressive film and book reviews, strange and outré music coverage, extreme art, passionate (often rabid) feature articles and fascinating interviews with icons of cult film and entertainment.

Under the guiding hand of editor David Flint, *Sheer Filth* managed 9 issues before being put to bed in 1990; the editor went on to (in his words) "bigger, glossier projects" (which include the seminal Fab Press book *Ten Years of Terror*

written with Harvey Fenton). But in those 9 issues *Sheer Filth* was the breeding ground for a number of prominent writers, who, like Flint, went on to bigger things; these writers included David Kerekes, John Hill and David Slater, amongst others; and the fanzine itself led to Headpress, Divinity and Sexadvice, also edited by Flint.

Fenton and Flint have collected together those 9 issues of *Sheer Filth* into one sleaze-tastic volume; it's a glorious read, bringing with it an authentic whiff of late-1980s anti-censorship sexual politics.

Flint introduces the volume with a fascinating account of the rise of the fanzine in the wake of the Video Nasty furore and the tightening of censorship under Thatcher. In the UK, mags like *Sheer Filth*, *Whiplash Smile*, *Bleeder's Digest* and *Rats in the Cellar* provided sleaze fans with a glimpse of the forbidden and the obscure, stuff that the mainstream publications would never touch (*Sheer Filth* brought the world the first coverage of Jörg Buttgeriet's *Nekromantik* and of the now cult classic *Deathbed*). As Flint says in his introduction, "The fanzines were part of what felt like a movement... of transgressive culture". Mags like *Sheer Filth* were a backlash against the moral conservatism of the 1980s: an attempt to blast open doors to a more open culture

by celebrating taboo subject matter – revelling in a world of "Sixties garage punk, fetish clubs, horror film festivals, illicit porn, industrial music, underground cinema, true crime, performance art, occult dabbling, extreme literature and general weirdness."

Sheer Filth furnishes a good dose of all of these things in its 240 pages: Cathal Tohill provides a comprehensive career retrospective of the Sultan of Sleaze, film producer David F. Friedman, complemented by an in-depth interview of the same by Flint; Dave Slater reviews the extreme circus of Archao; David Kerekes visits an exhibition of transgressive films depicting the body in extremis at Manchester's Cornerhouse; Ian Kerkhoff provides a scholarly account of Italian porn star/first lady of the Italian Parliament, La Cicciolina, in action; Tohill catalogues the 1940s-'60s cheesecake bondage movies of Irving Klaw; and there is much, much more besides.

In its celebration of graphic sleaze *Sheer Filth* has a certain nostalgic value in these access-all-areas internet times; but back in in the 1980s, Flint would have faced falling foul of the Obscene Publications Act with articles like 'Some Reflections on the Disappearance of the Cumshot'. And lest we forget just how pernicious the moral

reformers of the time really were, Flint reminds us of a House of Commons motion tabled in the early 1990s to widen the obscenity laws so as to prohibit the publication of *De Sade's Juliette* – this was a novel written in 1797!

But *Sheer Filth* is an important book not just because it provides a record of the battles against censorship by the 'unpopular' culture of the 1980s-90s; it also preserves some rare and fascinating interviews that would otherwise be destined to sink without a trace. Within its pages, Flint talks to cult figures like Hershell G. Lewis (giving a rare interview on his nude films); Buttgeriet; Samuel Z. Arkoff, Brit horror maestro Norman J. Warren; old time 'nude cutie' Pamela Green; and post-porn modernist, Annie Sprinkle. And what mainstream magazine would feature French auteur Robert Bresson alongside Pee Wee Herman in its pages?

Flint and Fenton are to be congratulated for this wonderful compilation of *Sheer Filth*. More than just a catalogue of depravity, it's an important cultural document. Let us hope similar fanzine collections (headcheese and Chainsaws, anyone?) are forthcoming.

JON TOWLS

+++++ 9



AGE OF SHIVA

AUTHOR: JAMES LOVEGROVE
PUBLISHER: SOLARIS BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

James Lovegrove's Godpunk series has been consistently fresh, interesting and exciting so far. The standalone novels each deal with a particular

pantheon of gods brought into the modern day. *Lovegrove* blends the mundane with the magical and stays a step beyond the usual urban fantasy fare by simply using the premise of gods walking amongst as one of many elements, rather than relying on centuries old legends to carry a novel. *Age of Shiva* continues in this fine tradition by mixing the ten avatars of Vishnu with the thoroughly modern concept of superhero teams.

The tale is narrated by an interesting character called Zak Zap (known as Zachary Bramwell to his mum). Zak is a comic book artist who gets forcibly invited to work for a trinity of billionaires in a mysterious complex in the Maldives. To his delight and surprise, he gets the job as the lead costume designer for a superhero team based on the Hindu faith. As this is a world

much like ours, you can imagine that someone who draws funny books for a living is more than a little bit suspicious of the whole set-up and wackiness ensues.

Zak is a very sympathetic and witty sort of chap, and the author uses him as an excuse to litter the book with fun little pop culture references. Everything from the Hulk to *Watchmen* gets a nod and the book is littered with amusing footnotes. Whereas *Age of Voodoo* was a spy thriller with supernatural elements and *Age of Satan* was a whistle-stop tour through classic British horror movies, *Age of Shiva* is a love poem to both comic books and the Hindu faith. The core idea (the Dashavatara as the inspiration for a superhero team) works really, really well and Lovegrove has clearly made a careful study of the rich lore surrounding them. The narrative

is careful not to alienate those who don't know their Vamana from their Varaha and one of the key characters of the story also doubles as a handy source of cultural knowledge.

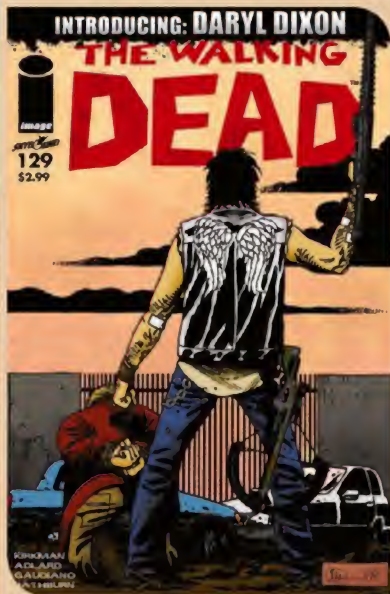
As always, *Lovegrove's* style is easy going and draws you in quickly. As the tale is told by a very unreliable narrator, there's plenty of room for the reader's imagination to soar between the gaps and this adds a further comic book feel to the entire affair. The tale does suffer from feeling like it could go on for a lot longer than it does and those more familiar with Indian mythology may see one or two of the twists and turns coming. Overall though, this is a fine addition to one of the best series in urban fantasy available today.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 9

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU THE
LATEST FROM THE
WORLD OF
COMIC BOOKS



Ah, April: that time of year when I have to be extra careful in picking and choosing the comics news, for fear of a little bullshit seeping in with your monthly digest. At the time of writing, it's just gone April the first, and all of the Internets are awash with lies. Even more so than usual, I mean.

We shan't dwell too heavily upon those April Fools (One Direction joining the cast of *The Expendables*? Ho ho ho) but it would be amiss of me to not mention the great prank pulled by Image Comics this month – teasing the possibility that fan favourite Daryl Dixon would be joining Robert Kirkman's *Walking Dead*. Norman Reedus himself has announced an ambition to see Daryl join Rick and co. in the comics, so this jape – aimed directly at Reedus – seems

alternate universes (hello Ultimate Spider-Man) and everywhere in-between. You might remember Morlun from the storyline *Spider-Man: The Other* (in which he 'killed' Parker and tore out his eyeballs) and generally wiped the floor with the poor wall-crawler at every given opportunity. It makes sense that your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man might need a little backup, then.

That's not the only alternate Spider-Man related news. Original creator Peter David

particularly cruel. Eagle-eyed readers might recognise the teaser artwork posted by Skybound (the company which runs Image) as a retold piece by Charlie Adlard, depicting Dwight, one of Negan's survivors, mid-rant. Well, at least he has the crossbow.

Now, on to the real news. Specifically, the first of the Big Two. The big event currently in the works is – no doubt in anticipation of a certain Spider-Man sequel – an ultimate Spidey crossover in which literally thousands of Spider-Men will come together to fight antagonist Morlun. Beginning in November's *Amazing Spider-Man* #9, the so-called 'Spider-Verse' draws its Spideys from the past, present, future and all the way through to

and artist Will Sliney are relaunching *Spider-Man* 2099 this summer – now set in the not-so futuristic 2114. We find Miguel O'Hara stranded in our present day, attempting to change the course of his own future and putting a halt to the rise of his enemies before they can ever happen. Like a reverse *Butterfly Effect*. *Spider-Man* 2099 kicks off this July. Except, you know, not in 2099.

Another character set to get his own ongoing is cyborg killer Deathlok, fresh from his appearance on TV's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Launching direct from Marvel's Original Sin event, the character will be getting his own series later this year. *Original Sins* #1 will be released in June, with Deathlok's own series locked in to follow.

Original Sins, in case you were wondering, being an anthology series which explores the side effects of the events depicted in *Original Sin* (the event, that is) and what they mean for the heroes and villains of the Marvel Universe. With the *Watcher* dead, *Original Sins* will show how the revealing of his secrets affects characters such as J. Jonah Jameson, *Deadpool* (who gets a 'complete origin') and the aforementioned *Deathlok*.

I brought you news, last month, of signs of life among the ashes in the *Marvel Ultimate Universe*, with the heroes therein coming together to repair their world in the aftermath of *Galactus*. To be fair, we all felt the same after watching *Rise of the Silver Surfer*. A new *Fantastic Four* rises there, comprised of Tony Stark, *Machine Man* (actually the *Gah Lak Tus* Swarm personified), *Falcon* and *Sue Storm*, with *Agent Phil Coulson* watching from the sidelines. It's an odd combination, to be fair, but at least it's not, you know, the cinematic lot we're about to get.

Now, to the DC Universe, which we find celebrating my absolute favourite



75 YEARS OF BATMAN

of occasions – no, not April Fools, silly – Batman month. To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Dark Knight's creation, DC have announced that April is the month for all things Batman. There's a nifty logo and everything.

Not that I need an excuse to post Batman related news, but DC and Dynamite have announced that Kevin Smith and Ralph Garman will team up with artist Ty Templeton to bring us a crossover between Batman 66 and The Green Hornet, beginning May 21st (June, if you want a physical copy). The digital first, twelve-issue series will see the dynamic duos team up to fight Colonel Gumm. Sounds like promising stuff – let's just hope Smith can resist the urge to have Batman piss himself again (see The Widening Gyre for details. Or don't).

Hey! Remember that one scene at the end of The Dark Knight Returns, in which Frank Miller had Batman beat the snot out of Superman before suffering a (pretend) heart attack and faking his own death? Frank Cho certainly does. Granted, this isn't completely within our remit, but Cho has released a recent commission depicting his own version of that showdown. By Cho's own admission, he really hates Superman. So it's no surprise that his work here isn't exactly sympathetic towards the Boy Scout. This is a piece of work in which Clark gets punched in the balls twice



and knocked out, stone cold, before getting a single swing in. Why? "Because you are... and always will be... a giant pussy!" Actually, come back Kevin Smith. All is forgiven.

It's enough to make you feel bad for

can't catch a break.

In Adventures of Superman: Ghosts of Krypton, Superman encounters bona fide spooks courtesy of horror scribe Steve Niles, who finds himself facing a threat he can't punch his way out of. At least the ghosts have the good grace to not call him "a giant pussy", though.

Finally, on the wind down, we head, as we usually do, to the relatively independent comics. We've heard recent news of a Prometheus sequel (with added Fassbender, no less). Not one to miss out on a trick, Dark Horse have announced that their new Alien and Predator comics will share the Prometheus universe, promising intertwined stories across the lines (comprising of Aliens, Predator, Aliens vs Predator and Prometheus) and plenty of Alien and Predator action therein.

Also getting his own tie-in is Jack Bauer, with IDW comics releasing a new series as a precursor to Jack's adventures in Live Another Day. 24: Underground will be released this month, and will build up to the eighth series in typical Bauer style.

Finally, in news that I only wish was an April Fools prank, I bring you the – frankly, terrifying – titbit that Angry Birds comic book series is to land (shot via catapult, no doubt) in IDW comics this June.

On that note, we close down the watchtower monitor for another month. Me, I'll be celebrating Batman month by reading The Dark Knight Returns again, playing Arkham City and munching on a Batman themed Kinder egg. If you really must distract me, however, you can do so at the usual Twitter handle and e-mail address...

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley





ZOMBIE WAR COMPLETE

WRITER: KEVIN EASTMAN, TOM SKULAN

ARTIST: KEVIN EASTMAN, TOM SKULAN

PUBLISHER: IDW

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Nostalgia can be a terrible burden some times. Often the things we seem to recall being utterly wonderful turn out to be a little bit disappointing once the dust has been blown off them.

Back in 1992, Tom Skulan and Kevin Eastman produced an odd little indie comic book called *Zombie War*. Eastman's previous creation, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, had already become a global phenomenon and at the time, this darker, George Romero-like action horror adventure story was seen as an attempt by Eastman to get back to his roots and produce something for more mature audiences. Given that those roots were based around the low-budget action and horror movies that were very common in the '80s, it's quite good for what it is, but it's the sort of thing that would appeal to those who like gore and nudity. It certainly isn't *Watchmen* and lacks the depth and subtlety we associate with grown-up comic books.

The plot is the sort of trash you'd expect from zombie tales of the time: an alien being uses strange science to raise the dead, and these ghouls proceed to wreak havoc on mankind. The zombies are intelligent, violent and hard to kill. This means that humanity is pretty much doomed, though of course there's a

plucky young heroine around to sort it all out. The plot and its resolution are very, very simplistic and strongly reminiscent of its source material. It's full of the sort of clichés that made those trash movies so much fun at the time and it's filled with violence and the occasional pretty lady. Eastman's art is a bit of an acquired taste; it's blocky, dark and straight forward. Though it can hardly be described as beautiful it does have a grungy and dark appeal to it.

If you haven't had your fill of zombies yet and have a fondness for Eastman's early art style then grab some junk food, put on your favourite nineties rock album and indulge yourself with this odd piece of comic history. Otherwise, leave the past alone.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 6



ÜBER: VOLUME 1

WRITER: KIERON GILLEN

ARTIST: CANAAN WHITE

PUBLISHER: AVATAR

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 22ND

It's April 1945, and the Second World War is nearing its end. Hitler retreats to his bunker as Russian forces topple Berlin. So far, so historically accurate. But the Nazis have one more trick up their sleeve – Übermenschen, a race of enhanced superhumans who could turn the tide of war. These anti-Captain Americas, bullet-resistant and able to blitz destructive energy from their eyes, are the crackingly scary central concept behind Kieron Gillen's *Über* – it's just the kind of batshit-crazy scheme perfect for comic book Nazis.

Starting with the defence of Berlin and leading up to a devastating assault on Paris, this first volume doesn't hold back, nor is it for the faint-hearted – Canaan White relishes depicting bloody carnage in brilliantly nasty detail (there must be an average of one brain pulled apart per page), all washed in a grungy palette of browns and greys. And red. A lot of red.

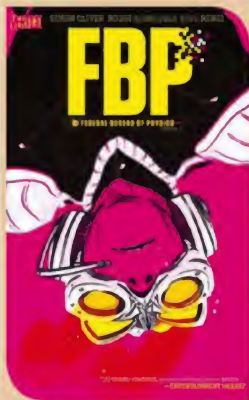
The narrative is carefully structured as an ensemble piece, taking in historical names such as Hitler, Churchill, Speer, and even Alan Turing, as well as a cast of original characters. The most interesting of these is Stephanie, a British scientist operating undercover in the Übermenschen laboratory. Hating herself for the terrible acts she's been involved in on both sides, Stephanie desires nothing more than to escape the war, but is duty-bound to help Churchill counter Germany's new-found power.

Many of the other characters, including the three 'battleship'-class Übermenschen (massive, indestructible bastards) are set up for further development down the line, if not explored in too much depth here – we spend less time inside their minds and more time literally inside the heads of the guys they're ripping apart.

What we do get is, through the various points of view, a complex analysis of how war shapes power structures and human nature – not a simple good vs evil tale as Nazi stories tend to be. While some characters commit dreadful acts without remorse, others, even among the Übermenschen, are much more regretful about their position in the war. At first you may feel uneasy being asked to sympathise with Nazi characters, but the book as a whole is in no way on their side. The world of *Über* is extremely morally complex and, over time, this cast of characters could become truly compelling. Volume 1 certainly packs a lot in and gets the story going with a bang. It's not easy reading but dark and clever stuff – you won't laugh, you probably won't cry, but it might make you think. It's a world where war is horrific and people in power make horrible decisions. A worryingly real world.

KIERON MOORE

+++++ 8



FBP - FEDERAL BUREAU OF PHYSICS VOL 1: THE PARADIGM SHIFT

WRITER: SIMON OLIVER
ARTIST: ROBBI RODRIGUEZ
PUBLISHER: VERTIGO
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Imagine a world in which the laws of physics regularly stopped working. A place where you could be walking down the street one minute and then suddenly find yourself hurtling toward the sky because you'd walked into an area where gravity had ceased to function. Or you lost weeks of your life due to a malfunction with time. This is the premise of the series FBP: Federal Bureau of Physics and the first book, *The Paradigm Shift*, introduces a team of government-funded agents whose job it is to fix things as best they can. When there's something strange in your neighbourhood, you call these plucky guys and gals.

As you might expect, this is a blend of police procedural drama and the weird. This book lays the groundwork for a deeper and complex conspiracy plot – from the first page it's swiftly apparent that there's an unexplained reason for all of this wackiness which will be revealed over time. The characters are reasonably interesting; nothing you wouldn't expect from a show like NCIS or CSI, and the author panders to these expected stereotypes very well. So much so that it does feel like the other shoe will drop at some point. Or maybe not drop – given the nature of this book it's more likely to turn into a banana.

Robbi Rodriguez's art is an interesting choice for this book; he has a distinctive and messy sensibility that can often be jarring. On the one hand the

characters look pretty bland, it isn't an art style that does beautiful people at all well and the few female characters look especially dull. However, his work really does pick up when it comes to the weird and bizarre; this is a book where the star of the show is physics gone mad and (quite rightly) the everyday people are less important. The quirky design does add to the piece reasonably well, but it is perhaps not everyone's taste and can be quite ugly in places.

FBP: Federal Bureau of Physics Vol. 1: *The Paradigm Shift* is a well written sci-fi thriller which has 'TV show pitch' written all over it. If you like your detective shows deeply strange, or you're just a fan of shows like *Fringe*, then it's worth a look.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 7



THE RETURN OF ZITA THE SPACE GIRL

WRITER: BEN HATKE
ARTIST: BEN HATKE
PUBLISHER: FIRST SECOND
RELEASE DATE: MAY 13TH

Given how large and important the comic book industry has become, you can be forgiven if you have forgotten their main purpose is to be fun. *The Return of Zita the Spacegirl* is one of those books that combines a good story with the sort of cartoon-like fun that should be a part of anyone's childhood.

This final part of the trilogy sees the titular Zita thrown into jail by The Dungeon Lord, thanks to a list of trumped-up charges. When Zita works out that she has been deceived, she hatches an audacious escape plan and given that this is a book that is as much about the humour as it is about the plot, it takes more than one attempt. Of course there is a dastardly conspiracy to be thwarted, old friends to be rescued and a variety of twists and turns that draw the reader into a child-like world full of adventure and strange-looking aliens.

Hatke's art style is incredibly charming and goes hand in hand with his warm and clever writing style. This is a book filled with cute creatures and funny-looking heroes and yet somehow it avoids being saccharine or condescending. What Hatke has done is evoked that feeling of family fun and engagement that a good Pixar or Studio Ghibli movie gives you and Zita's world feels every bit as real and believable as that of Kiki's Delivery Service or Toy Story. There are also various visual puns throughout the book that lend strength to the humour of the work and

this is a deceptively deep and clever book of the sort that will delight adults and cause children to read it again and again.

The Return of Zita the Spacegirl works well as a standalone story though obviously it contains spoilers for the previous two books in the series (and you're better off reading those first). If you don't like cute family fare then this won't be for you, but if you're into stories that appeal to the entire family or if there's a budding sci-fi geek in your life who's just getting into the weird world of comics then you should give Hatke's work a look, this book especially.

ED FORTUNE

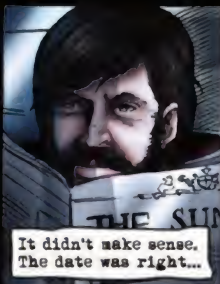
+++++ 7



The first time it happened, I thought I was dreaming.

Just a moment earlier I had fallen asleep at home - finally - and now I was sitting on a bus.

No money, no house keys and about three month's worth of beard.



It didn't make sense. The date was right...

Grant Kempster & Dan Schaefer

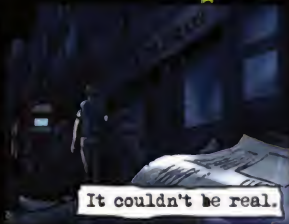
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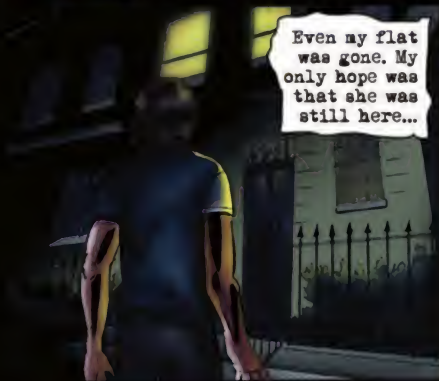
...but everything else was wrong. Football teams I'd never heard of, an ongoing war in the Far East and... a President of England?



It couldn't be real.



Even my flat was gone. My only hope was that she was still here...



...Rachel.





PIXEL JUICE

VIDEOGAMING
NEWS & PREVIEWS
BY LEE PRICE



ALIEN: ISOLATION Set for October Release

It's nearly here. The latest in the Alien franchise of videogames has been set for release on October 7th, just in time for gamers to get the game in for Halloween.

Isolation will be a departure from the more recent games in the franchise, eschewing the usual frenetic mechanics for a survival horror theme that I am willing to bet will suit the game down to the ground. It's pretty easy to make the argument that Alien is as much a horror film as a sci-fi one, so if SEGA are able to create anything like that level of tension in their game then this is going to be a must have.

Alistair Hope, Creative Lead at developer Creative Assembly, commented: "We couldn't be happier to finally announce a date for Alien: Isolation. The reaction we have seen so far has been simply incredible, from the screams and shrieks to the cold sweats and racing hearts. It's the Alien game that we've always wanted to play and we can't wait to let everyone get their hands on it this fall."

Gameplay videos put me in mind of the brilliant Dead Space, with a sprinkling of Doom 3 thrown in for good measure. Hopefully this is as good as it looks like it will be.

Sony to Lead Charge in Virtual Reality Gaming

Okay, so perhaps we need to pretend the Virtual Boy never happened for that headline to be true (Nintendo sure wish they could) but it looks like the advent of virtual reality gaming is drawing ever nearer.

Sony have revealed a prototype of their

virtual reality system at the recent GDC event. Named Project Morpheus, the device will offer a 90 degree field of vision, with a whole bunch of sensors to detect movement and the like, plus a PlayStation Camera to keep track on what the head is doing. As it registers movement it will shift the game world around the player, immersing them in the experience.

Shu Yoshida claimed, "Virtual reality is the next innovation from SCE that we believe will shape the future of games. I have long dreamed about VR and the possibilities it brings in regards to game development. This new technology will deliver a sense of presence, where you as the player actually feel like you're inside the game and your emotions feel that much more real."

Exciting stuff. We now live in a world where this sort of stuff can happen in colours other than red and black so it is really fun to think of what could be achieved here. Will Project Morpheus revolutionise the way we play games, or will it go the way of the WiiMote following all the hype. I guess we will find out soon enough.

COMING SOON



MARIO KART 8

PLATFORM: WII U
RELEASE DATE: MAY 30TH

Finally Nintendo is bringing out the big guns in an effort to claw some ground back in the console wars. The Mario Kart series is a proven seller and the games are always a ton of laughs. Expect more of the same here, with plenty of the usual A.I. complaints to go along with it. Mario Kart really shines in multiplayer though, so Nintendo must surely be hoping that Wii U owners could convince friends to look at the console more with a dose of everyone's favourite plumber.

Facebook Get in on the Virtual Reality Game

And just like that, Mr Zuckerberg pops his head out and announces that Facebook have purchased Oculus VR, Inc for a whopping \$2 billion. Oculus' bit of kit may be the only rival to Project Morpheus and, with the Facebook machine behind it, you can bet it will feature tons of social interaction with all of those wonderful

COMING SOON



PLANETARY ANNIHILATION

PLATFORM: PC
RELEASE DATE: MAY 27TH

Kickstarter strikes again! The team behind Supreme Commander took to the fundraising tool to raise \$900,000 and ended up with about \$2.2million. That has allowed them to create a new real-time strategy game that will allow gamers to explore hundreds of planets and take part in 40 player battles. Supreme Commander was highly regarded and there is clearly plenty of anticipation for this game. It may well be worth a look.

COMING SOON



WATCH DOGS

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE

RELEASE DATE: MAY 27TH

Ubisoft are finally releasing a game that doesn't have the Assassin's Creed stamp all over it! *WATCH DOGS* has an interesting concept, putting the player in the shoes of an exceptionally skilled hacker and providing them with an open world that will allow for all manner of tricks. *WATCH DOGS* has a ton of pre-release awards to its name, so there is tons of hype behind this one. Ubisoft claim the hacking gameplay is fairly realistic as well so this should be interesting.

people in your computer, most of whom you never speak to.

Urgh. Ok, let's focus on the positives. Zuckerberg has already mentioned that he envisions the system being the future of gaming, so you will be able to play piss-poor Harvest Moon and Bejewelled rip-offs to your heart's content whilst constantly being asked for money to buy digital items you don't need to play games that are no good.

Ok, positive didn't work. Let's not look at this from a gaming perspective. Zuckerberg envisions the device as being the next big thing in everything from education to communications so he clearly has big plans for the company behind it. Something tells me he may just be overreaching though.

Trademark Registered for New DEUS EX

It looks like we have a candidate for the title of the latest in the Deus Ex series. It has been confirmed that Deus Ex: Mankind Divided has been trademarked by Square, meaning that the latest in the absolutely stellar series is nearing release.

There are no details about the plot of the game as yet, though you can bet with a title like that it's going to focus on the divide caused by the augmentation of humans that is the driving force of the Deus Ex experience.

The title is currently in development for next-gen titles and it is hugely exciting to think of the things that could be done with all that extra power. The original is still one of the most creative and brilliant games ever created so if they can come

close to matching that then this is going to be a hell of an experience.

COMING SOON



MURDERED: SOUL SUSPECT

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 3RD

I'm just a little bit excited about this. *Murdered* sees you take control of Ronan O'Connor, a detective who has been murdered and comes back as a ghost. Ronan isn't happy about the whole being murdered thing, so he uses his ghostly powers to investigate his own death, with the eventual aim being to solve the crime so that he can rest in peace. It's nice to see a title being released with a fairly original concept so keep your eye out for this one.

CASTLEVANIA Producer Leaves Konami

Koji Igarashi, who has been the producer of the acclaimed Castlevania series for the better part of 20 years, has announced that he has left Konami to work on projects outside of the company.

He commented: "I've decided to break out on my own to have the freedom to make the kind of games I really want to make - the same kind I think fans of my past games want as well."

Well that hints at perhaps a touch of dissatisfaction with the recent developments in the Castlevania games now doesn't it?

Igarashi started working on the series during production of the spectacular *Symphony of the Night*, which is still the best Castlevania game ever made. Seriously buy it on XBLA or PSN. Now! I'll wait.

Got it? Good. The series has never quite managed to hit *Symphony's* heights, but the handheld entries have been quality games for a number of years. However, with the advent of *Lord of Shadows* signalling Konami's intent to keep ripping off the likes of *Devil May Cry*, it appears Igarashi wants to get back to work making games that he and fans of his previous work will enjoy.

I, for one, will be keeping an eye out for his new projects.



GAUNTLET Returns

It is always with a touch of trepidation that I approach the re-imagining of a classic game from yesteryear. For many a year Gauntlet was the name in the dungeon crawler genre, allowing up to four players to slash and magic their way through legions of enemies in their local arcades.

Of course, it's all changed now as good arcades simply don't exist anymore. On top of that, more recent Gauntlet efforts haven't been anything special so it seemed that the franchise was pretty much done with.

Not so! Warner Bros. have announced that the game will be coming back as an Action-RPG and will be made available on Steam this summer in addition to the WB's new digital service.

Johan Pilestedt, CEO of developers Arrowhead, commented: "To us at

Arrowhead, Gauntlet is one of the most defining games from our childhoods, and it's amazing to be able to work with Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment on a brand new version. Gauntlet is one of the original and best known video game properties and we are looking forward to creating a fresh, yet true to the original, take on a multiplayer masterpiece."

Early news regarding the gameplay suggests that it will actually be keeping pretty close to the original's premise, allowing gamers to select one of four characters, each with different abilities, before exploring the various dungeons put in their way.

Online and local co-op will be included and I must admit that I am a little excited for this one. I just hope it doesn't get caught up in trying to incorporate too much from the newer generations of games.

COMING SOON



ULTRA STREET FIGHTER VI

PLATFORM: XBOX 360, PS3

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 2014

If there was ever a company that you can count on to milk the hell out of any of their successful franchises, that company would be Capcom. I adore many of their games, but the phrase 'flogging a dead horse' means nothing to them. Instead of Street Fighter V, Capcom are bringing us the millionth Street Fighter IV with Ultra. Expect a few new characters, tweaks to the gameplay and all of the arguments that will cause in the hardcore community.

Kojima to Reboot SILENT HILL

Now this one sounds intriguing. The rumour mill is stirring once again and this time it's claiming that the man behind the Metal Gear Solid series may be gearing up to try his hand at a bit of horror.

Kojima himself made the revelation that he was approached about looking at the Silent Hill series back in 2012, stating in a recent interview: "Honestly, I'm kind of a scaredy-cat when it comes to horror movies, so I'm not confident I can do it. At the same time, there's a certain type of horror that only people who are scared of can create, so maybe it's something I can do. I'd love to help it continue, and if I can help by supervising or lending the technology of the Fox Engine, then I'd love to participate in that respect. A guy that is such a chicken and is so easily scared [referring to himself] - making a scary game - I'm very confident that something horrifying would come out from that. But on the other hand I would have to prepare myself to have nightmares every single day. Hopefully sometime in the future I'm able to work on this, but I would really need to prepare to have daily nightmares."

It sounds bloody promising and, with the recent stagnation of the series being considered, getting one of the most creative minds in gaming to work on it, especially when he sounds so keen to do so, can only be a good thing.

COMING SOON



ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PS4

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 17TH

By the time you hold this magazine in your hands, PC gamers will be enjoying the delights of the newest, most ambitious Elder Scrolls game. I'm going to go out on a limb and say that it will be awesome, despite a few bugs, and that console gamers will be extremely jealous. All you need to do is wait (and have a new generation console) though, as one of the first major games that the older systems simply can't handle is nearly here. Expect this to sell bucketloads.



DARK SOULS II

DEVELOPER: FROM SOFTWARE / PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO / FORMAT: PS3 (REVIEWED), 360, PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The first title in this franchise, 2009's *Demon's Souls*, came out of nowhere and managed to sustain itself on a steady diet of the hushed, reverent tones of word-of-mouth. In an age where a sizeable chunk of a title's development budget is spent on promotion, it was From Software that waited patiently in the corner, quality product in hand, for the gamers to come find them.

It worked. From knew that a rich, challenging, unforgiving yet respectful game was precisely what gamers, weaned on the paint-by-numbers, handholding titles of recent years, were craving. They simply had to let those same gamers discover that fact for themselves. Five years later and one of the most hotly anticipated titles of the year is finally upon us. This is *Dark Souls II*. Prepare to buy.

Dark Souls II, a "spiritual" sequel to *Dark Souls*, the breakout hit of 2011, is a third-person, action RPG set in a fantasy world of Kings, Queens, knights, sorcerers, demons, dragons, friend and foe. Mainly foe. This is a role playing game with the emphasis firmly on the role playing aspect. The story is there. It's a rich, layered world with a deep, fascinating lore. But the story has to be sought out by the player. Nothing in this world is handed to you on a plate, the narrative in particular. As your character awakens in a forest, clad only in rags, you will be as much in the dark as they are. Even your first port of call, a small hut occupied by three friendly, cackling witches doesn't give you much to go on. It is here where you learn of the curse you are burdened with and are given only the most basic of tools to start your journey to find a cure. After picking your starting class and character design you are gently ushered into the sometimes beautiful, mostly distressing world of Drangleic with nary a clue as to where to go or what to expect. This is the masterstroke

of From's design held over from the previous games. Complete freedom of choice as to how you play in a world that insists you abide by its strict rules.

Oh and, yes, you *will* die. Repeatedly. Yet it will always be your own fault. It's part of From's devilish design. "You will learn from your mistakes" is what they are telling you, and they won't take no for an answer. Button bashing is the fastest route to failure and every step you take requires that you be on the defensive and have complete awareness of your surroundings at all times. Die and you will be sent back to your last bonfire (the *Dark Souls* equivalent of a checkpoint) with your humanity gone, every enemy respawned and a little chunk of your life meter removed. The only way to regain your humanity and that much needed full health bar is with a painfully scarce item, the Human Effigy. It's firm but fair.

It's difficult to go in depth when discussing the finer points of a game such as this without taking up the

whole magazine. There's the passive aggressive online element that brings co-operative and competitive play together into one glorious fusion of parallel worlds. There's From's gorgeous aesthetic, inspired by all manner of fantasy sources (Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* springs to mind) yet, at the same time, unique to the world of *Souls*. There's the level design, more sprawling than the tightly woven world of *Lordran* from the previous game, but no less fiendish. Most importantly, there's the exquisitely designed combat system, where every move counts, every glance of your weapon on a nearby wall or enemy shield is curse worthy and every drain on the stamina bar is tense enough to induce a flash flood of sweat on your palms. All of which conspire to deliver yet another reason to spend hours upon of hours of your spare time, well into New Game +, lost in another of From's wonderful worlds.

If you've always been curious but never dared to take the plunge then *Dark Souls II* is the perfect point to jump in. Whilst some purists may balk at the recycling of bosses from the previous title (which happens twice, maybe three times throughout the course of the 60 to 80 hour playthrough) and have a problem with almost all aspects of the gameplay being more accessible to newcomers (which was a conscious decision on behalf of the studio after being delightfully abused for the duration of the first two games) there's nothing here that tampers with the purity of the originals. With fast travel from the very start, a more clearly defined Covenant system (factions that define how you play online) and a streamlined, user friendly interface, this is a *Souls* title with momentum. It may be more of the same, but when more of the same is precisely what we wanted then who are we to argue? The *Souls* are back. Praise the fun!

ANDY HALL

+++++10





TITANFALL

DEVELOPER: RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT / PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PLATFORM: XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As easily the most anticipated next gen title besides Watch Dogs, Titanfall has a lot riding on it. Produced by a company of former Call of Duty devs and mixing high speed combat with mechs, it looks like a match made in heaven. For the most part, it actually lives up to these expectations.

The story is your fairly generic fare. Effectively serving as Firefly with less Joss Whedon and more Starhawk, you have the mega corp on

one side and a ragtag alliance of frontier worlds on the other. It's brief, forgettable and ultimately what you'd expect from the people who brought us previous Modern Warfare titles, with the real meat lying in the multiplayer option. In all likelihood you'll only play through it once, just so you can get your hands on the two, otherwise locked, titans.

The multiplayer itself serves as some insane combination of modern

military FPS and Brink, with just a touch of Star Wars: Battlefront. Each side consists of a handful of experienced players backed by a metric ton of weak AI bots which can be farmed for quick kills. Killing enough foes allows you to drop titans onto the battlefield, which allows your free-running pilot to start wrecking everything in sight.

While one certainly has more firepower, the surprising thing is that both choices are surprisingly well balanced. You can easily be just as effective, if not more so, on foot, free-running along walls and picking off enemy units one at a time. You're definitely a smaller target and the fluid speed offered is something which has not been so perfectly executed since the days of Quake III.

Along with a wide assortment of big guns, even bigger guns and explosives, Titanfall has the strangely effective addition of burn cards. These offer single use bonuses which can greatly augment each player, providing everything from permanent cloaking to more minor boosts.

As with almost any launch title, there are balance issues and certain cards are among them. Wifi Virus, Spider Sense and Double Agent all give far too much of an edge for what they are. Other weapons modifications like the smart pistol's enhanced targeting make life far too easy for certain players, especially when farming bots.

As a whole however, Titanfall is a very solid release. While not completely revolutionising FPS, it puts a great spin on it. If you're going to get an Xbox One, get it for Titanfall.

CALLUM SHEPARD

+++++++ 9



BIOSHOCK INFINITE: BURIAL AT SEA - EPISODE 2

DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES / PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES / PLATFORM: MULTIPLE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Taking place directly after the shocking cliffhanger of Episode 1, the second part of Burial at Sea has the player taking the role of Elizabeth. Trapped far from Rapture and surrounded by psychopaths, she is forced to make a deal with the devil. Haunted by images of the past and the future she denied by coming to Rapture, things take a turn for the strange once she starts hearing the voices of the dead.

A new protagonist to any series can change many things,

but this second episode takes full advantage of this. With Booker typically providing the muscle in previous BioShock Infinite games, Elizabeth is less a brawler and much more of a tactical fighter. Utilising plasmids and a few new weapons, the player is expected to sneak and plan their way through each area and this does wonders for it. BioShock as a series has typically suffered from weak combat, often having little need for plasmids or tonics in any

fight due to high stamina and reliable firearms. By turning to a more Dishonoured-style approach of stealth and guile, you are forced to rely upon them far more. While it doesn't handle stealth as well as that last game, or even the recent Thief, it's competently handled and it makes Splicers a dire threat rather than mere cannon fodder. While still as linear as the rest of BioShock Infinite, the beautifully grimy and decayed levels are competently handled with this in mind and there are far more openings to explore than before.

In a first for the series, the failings do not come from the mechanics, but the story. Attempting to further bridge the gap between Rapture and Columbia, Burial at Sea - Episode 2 just can't help but keep changing things. While people complained about BioShock 2's retons, here we have entire character motivations and histories being altered at the drop of a hat. Hand-waved away under the justification of quantum mechanical nonsense, the elements added largely weakened the overall story. Major rebel

characters especially suffer from ill thought out additions to the tale, and the revelations here are pointless at best. Everything here really comes down to fan service, with the plot being more an excuse to see everything one last time. While this may well have been what Burial at Sea offered, it's hard to appreciate when it weakens the overall work.

Easily weaker than the first episode, Burial at Sea is more interesting than it is truly good. The ideas are there and there are some admirable pushes for innovation, but poor decisions to alter the story hold it back from greatness.

CALLUM SHEPARD

+++++ 5





SOUTH PARK: THE STICK OF TRUTH

DEVELOPER: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT, SOUTH PARK DIGITAL STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: UBISOFT / FORMAT: PS3 (REVIEWED), 360, PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Remember all those attempts at making a South Park game? Fans have had to endure snowball first-person shooters, karting spin-offs, tower defence titles and even a mini-game compilation curated by Chef from his Luv Shack. But now with Matt Stone and Trey Parker finally determined to see their obscene universe given video game justice, they have jumped aboard with Obsidian entertainment to write and creatively oversee the RPG epic, South Park: The Stick of Truth.

Luckily for them (and us), it is a move that has yielded wonderful results. The Stick of Truth works not only as an incredibly enjoyable RPG experience, but it might also be the finest use of a creative license in video game history. The town of South Park has been fully realised in an open world, references to episodes litter the environment and you can even summon Jesus to deliver barrages of gunfire against an unborn foetus. It's everything you'd want from an interactive version of South Park.

The gameplay itself is traditional, yet refreshingly simple, turn-based RPG akin to a Paper Mario title. It cleverly streamlines a lot of the complexities associated with modern games in the genre to focus on the brilliantly absurd humour and plot. You play as a blank slate, a voiceless and customizable South Park character who moves into the town and soon has to start making friends with the locals. After a promotion to "douchebag" status and a few lessons in the art of dragon farts, you're soon wrapped up in the kids' quest to control the all important stick of truth.

Whether you're a seasoned RPG player or a genre newbie, you probably won't find too much of a challenge in The Stick of Truth. The combat is relatively basic and if you explore all the side-quests it doesn't take long

to acquire special weapons and items which slightly overpower most of the enemies in the main story. But whether you're ripping farts on "the ginger kids" or watching Butters unleash the might of Professor Chaos, it's an experience that never becomes dull over its concise 13-14 hour campaign.

This is largely because it feels exactly like an episode of South Park. The shoddy animation style, the shuffle movement of the characters and even the show's transition jingles all feature in The Stick of Truth. Every bedroom closet hides an abundance of references and you'll smile every time you hear 'Kyle's Mom's A Bitch' or Jennifer Lopez's 'Taco-Flavored Kisses' playing on a shop radio. The majority of fan favourite characters get at least a little bit of screen time too, from Mr. Hanky's hilarious domestic issues to Al Gore who's still 'super serial' about hunting ManBearPig.

It perhaps isn't surprising that South Park: The Stick of Truth might also be the funniest game ever made. Humour has been executed well in games before, as Portal 2 or The Stanley Parable have shown, but nothing has

quite achieved the belly laughs on offer here. Matt Stone and Trey Parker haven't simply written a great extended version of the show, they've used it as an opportunity to provide satirical spins on game mechanics and trends that have emerged over the past few years. It's safe to say, you haven't faced Nazi zombies quite like these before.

There are a few technical issues with slowdown and jugs in the frame rate, but it isn't enough to stop this being an absolute must-play for any South Park fan. It's outrageous, filled with unforgettable moments and is a complete blast from beginning to end. While the game's appeal might be lost on the unconverted, this isn't designed for them. This is for every fan who has ever dreamt about tossing farts at Kyle or calling upon Mr. Slave to violently ingest a homeless man through his anus. If that doesn't sound like fun, then sorry guys but you're going home.

ADAM STARKEY

+++++ 9



STARBURST

RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



TUULS OF THE TRADE

Hello readers! You might have noticed by now that this month we're celebrating four whole hundred years of Retro Bytes. Or is it a four hundred-page special issue? It's something to do with four hundred, whatever it is. To tie in with this, someone suggested doing a rundown of the best four hundred games of all time. But that's a stupid idea, so instead we're going with four games that will take you ages to get through. Because that's a much better plan, isn't it? We've already broken two of teacher's golden rules of grammar in this paragraph, so we're off to a cracking start whatever we're up to. Let's just get on with it, shall we? It's nearly deadline day again so the sooner the better, really...

SECRET OF EVERMORE (1996)

Developed by Square (most well-known for the *Final Fantasy* series), *Secret of Evermore* was a rarity in their back catalogue at the time of its release. Square specialised in RPGs which, in those days, were often frowned upon by gamers due to their awkward menu systems and cumbersome controls. While a few Square titles had been successful outside of their native Japan - *Final Fantasy* and *Secret of Mana* in particular had garnered vast amounts of critical acclaim - they also had a huge amount of titles that never even saw the light of day in the west. Therefore the decision was made to develop a brand new game in the USA, and release it exclusively in Northern America and Europe in an attempt to reach a wider audience.

This might seem like a very basic change, but *Secret of Evermore* ended up being one of the most accessible

RPGs of its time. Japanese games were known for impossibly complicated stories and strange little impish characters that no westerner could really relate to, but Square's USA team changed things around a bit and managed to create a story that - while not exactly groundbreaking - was at least easier for its target audience to get its teeth into.

Long story short, a young sci-fi nerd is out walking his dog one afternoon and breaks into an old run-down deserted mansion. Inside they find a strange machine which they inadvertently activate and find themselves transported to another dimension. It turns out the scientist who created the machine was also sent to this strange place many years ago, along with a group of his friends. They all got separated, and set up their own kingdoms in the land of Evermore - they'd probably seen a few episodes of *Dungeons & Dragons* before their "accident" and knew it wasn't going to be worth faffing around trying to get

home so they might as well make themselves comfortable.

Each of the scientist's pals built their kingdoms based on their personal favourite things. What this means is that you get a world filled with caves and dinosaurs, one set in a weird version of ancient Greece, a medieval world, and a future zone. It's a bit like the *Crystal Maze* gone absolutely mental. And you can guess what you have to do - reunite the scientist with his buddies and find your way back home!

The game borrows its combat and menu systems straight from *The Secret of Mana* (people liked it so why not keep it?), but adds a more accessible story and the ability to control a second character. While your main character can talk to the locals and use magic (as long as he's got the right ingredients in his inventory to cast the spells), you can also control his canine chum who is able to find more items in the environment and uses his teeth to perform strong physical attacks.

Despite being well received when it was released, *Secret of Evermore* seems to have been lost to those mysterious mists of time. It's well worth seeking out though, especially if you're in the mood for something gripping but daft. Although if you're in the mood for quirky, you could also try...

EARTHBOUND (1995)

Set in the modern day, *EarthBound* does away with most of the usual fantastical JRPG elements steeped in mythology and lore, focusing instead on a group of children trying to solve the mystery of a meteorite which has landed in their home town. It turns out the meteor was sent from the future by the evil alien Gigas, and the kids have to stop him and save the world. You could have guessed the last part of that sentence, right?

The game's modern setting changes things up nicely - weapons are bought from shops, money is obtained from cash machines (your dad regularly pays pocket money straight into your account), and enemies include wild animals and "street punks" (as well as aliens and monsters, of course). Baseball bats and catapults are among the available weapons, and different kinds of clothing can be equipped to change your abilities. The dialogue in *EarthBound* always raises a smile; the characters are all pretty funny looking in an early-*Simpsons* sort of way, and the jaunty background music will stay

in your head for weeks.

Like many other titles, this was a huge hit in Japan (if we had a bit more space we would have mentioned how it was originally called "Mother", translated for release in the US, cancelled before release, then remade by its original creator as "Mother 2" and finally released in America as "EarthBound") but pretty much failed miserably everywhere else. Possibly a victim of a dodgy advertising campaign that led to gamers not even understanding what kind of game it was, the lack of sales meant that western releases of its sequels were cancelled completely. Almost 20 years since its release, *EarthBound* still stands as one of the greatest 16-bit RPGs ever made. Thanks to the Wii's Virtual Console it's now readily available to pretty much everyone, and we urge you all to give it a try!

DRAGON VIEW (1994)

Here's a strange one. It's an RPG (you've probably noticed the theme of this month's games by now), but it's... odd... The story isn't too gripping, basically boiling down to a young soldier having to rescue his girlfriend from an evil wizard, but the hybrid of mechanics that make up the gameplay really makes it stand out from a lot of other RPGs.

When you're mooching around towns or fighting your way through any of the game's dungeons, the game uses a side-on perspective which is really handy for chatting to villagers and stabbing giant scorpions to death. Getting from one town to another is a different story though, as the viewpoint changes to a first person 3D perspective. This isn't completely effective as it's super-easy to get stuck on bits of scenery, but it brings a nice change of pace that offers something different to most of the other games that were around at the time. You'll come across plenty of JRPG-style "random encounters" during these parts of the game, where suddenly you switch back to a side-on view while you beat up whatever enemy has decided to interrupt your journey. These encounters



are useful for levelling up your character and collecting useful items and power-ups that will come in handy when you reach your destination.

Most of the towns in the game look pretty much identical which is a shame, but the platforming and puzzle elements in the dungeons more than make up for it. The selection of items, weapons and magic abilities are all fun to use, and become even more enticing when you've managed to level up a bit and increase your powers. Plenty to get stuck into, and even if it's not really your cup of tea the combination of 3D and 2D gameplay make it well worth checking out even just for curiosity's sake.

BLACKTHORNE (1994)

Last but not least, and we're sort of cheating a bit here because it's not really a full-on RPG (but it doesn't matter because we're nearly finished for this month), a forgotten platformer by the name of *Blackthorne*. Mysteriously re-named *Blackhawk* outside the USA (*Blackthorne*'s so much more intriguing, surely?), this forgotten gem combines *Prince of Persia*-style platforming with a heavy focus on

exploration and item management to create a really unique experience.

Developed by Blizzard, *Blackthorne*'s story is about as mental as you might expect from the company who would later create *World of Warcraft*. We'll go with the short version because we're running out of space: there's this king who has two sons, but on his deathbed he can't decide which one of them should be his successor. He splits his body into two stones, light and dark, with both sons taking one stone each and setting off to rule their own separate kingdoms in the land of Tuul (the headline of this article makes sense now, doesn't it?). Over time however, one kingdom turns against their stone and its power turns into monsters. The leader of the darkstone's kingdom then sets up an army to claim the lightstone as his own and gain ultimate control of the land. We're not done there though - the keeper of the lightstone sends his own son to Earth with the lightstone, hoping that he will be able to keep it safe from the invading marauders. More years pass and it's time for the lightstone to be returned to its rightful home, and as a heavy metal-mulleted skinny jeans n' vest-wearing former mercenary and all-round action hero it's your job to make sure it gets there safely...

Yes, that really was the short version of the story.

A couple of innovations in the combat system make *Blackthorne* different from many other platformers - enemy attacks are dodged by leaning into the background, before popping back out to return fire at the huge hulking blue orcs and wide array of other baddies that are all out to get you. Your main weapon is a shotgun which can be upgraded to the point where it becomes an all-singing all-dancing fully-automatic rapid-fire implement of carnage, and there are secondary weapons that add further firepower to your arsenal. It's completely insane of course, but that's why we wanted to tell you about it. Have a look for yourself, and do please let us know if you've got any recommendations for similarly bizarre titles!



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU INTO
THE REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



There is a scene in the Disney movie *Lilo & Stitch* in which the alien monster *Stitch* builds a perfect replica of the city of San Francisco in just the right scale so he can rampage through the model cityscape like an alien monster. The same idea appears in the TV series *Pushing Daisies* with small children dressed as kaiju running amok amongst a replica polystyrene city. It looks like a lot of fun.

Sadly being a six-foot tall middle aged man, the logistics of finding the right sort of Godzilla costume and getting a replica of Tokyo City made are a little bit beyond me.

Luckily, other people also want to know what it's like to go on a monstrous rampage through a packed city, chomping down on innocent civilians and firing radioactive breath all over the place. *Rampage* by Repose Productions is an odd little board game that encourages the players to act like enormous monsters. It's a 3D game and though the pedants amongst you will be swift to point out

that all board-games are, by their nature, in three dimensions what they mean by this is that you stack certain pieces on top of each other and height, width and length are all crucial elements of the game design. This includes big and chunky playing pieces and very fun looking giant lizard monsters.

The board is composed of stacked floor tiles. Multi-storey buildings are made by sandwiching tiles between meeples, those stylised wooden people you see in various board games. Every time you get four meeples on a tile, the

building goes up another floor. These little wooden people stay on the board, minding their own business until your monster turns up and eats them. The more meeples of the same colour you consume, the more points you get.

Of course, before you can chow down on the people inside the building you have to smash it down, and this is done quite literally. You can drop your monster on the tiles, attempt to blow the building down or flick other models at the building. Players literally rampage around in an attempt to become the biggest, scariest monster there is. *Rampage* is a deeply silly game aimed at kids of all ages and though it's a little hazardous for younger players (mostly because they get too excited) it's perfect for anyone who's ever wanted to go on a city-wide smashing fest. It's also quick to play, though after each game you do have to tidy the mess. (Something the real Godzilla never has to do.)

Rampage is fairly customisable and though the monster pieces all look the same, each player has power cards that allow them to do special moves. With a little imagination, you can recreate scenes from your favourite kaiju movie.

Alternatively, you can just go for the officially licensed product. *Godzilla: Kaiju World Wars* by Toy Vault pretty much does what it says on the tin. You get to play one of four kaiju: Godzilla, King Ghidorah, Rodan, or Gigan and go on a wrecking spree around the city.

Again, the game is 3D – you can cheerfully spend some time making little cardboard skyscrapers for your hideous monsters to wreck and ruin. Unlike the *Rampage* the aim of the game isn't as simple as 'eat everybody', there are multiple scenarios you can try. Mostly they boil down to 'kill all other monsters' or 'kill the military'. One of the nice features of *Godzilla: Kaiju World Wars* is that it features tanks and the like trying to take out the monsters. They work pretty much the same way as hazards





do in other games and in most scenarios are just a speed bump rather than a real challenge. Which is as it should be in a game that is, essentially a big fight between monsters.

Sadly, it suffers quite severely from Toy Vault's inexperience with complex tactical games, which shouldn't come as much as a surprise as it does feel like this game was designed as a big impressive toy for young children first and as an actual game a distant last.

Though the monster and building pieces look lovely, the rulebook is sparse, poorly put together and confusing. There are barely enough counters in the box to make the game work the way it's supposed to and there are hefty gaps in the actual rules. Though it's benefitted from a hefty online FAQ and the fan community has gone out of its way to fix the game, these days you really do expect everything to work straight from the off. Still, if you strip the thing down to its most basic rules then you should be able to play something that inexperienced gamers will enjoy, and as introductions to war gaming go, it does okay. Still, it feels like a bit of a waste as the components promise a much better game than the rules deliver. On the other hand, if you fancy designing your own monster game then there are probably relatively cheap copies still available in toy stores.

A better monster themed introduction to blowing things up on the table top is *Monsterpocalypse*, produced by rising star of wargaming, Privateer Press. Better known for their games *Warmachine* and *Hordes*, Privateer Press are seen by many as the best wargaming firm out there. Thanks to well-designed games with regular rules updates and clear communications to the fans, their stock has risen considerably over the years. It may seem like simply good business practice to outsiders, but sadly it's a rarity in the wargaming world.

Monsterpocalypse is a collectible miniatures game. Unlike similar games in the market, Privateer Press have made it specifically to reel in young gamers and get them into the hobby. As such the point

of entry is pretty cheap - a starter set gets you enough pre-painted monsters, tokens, counters and rules for two players. Gameplay starts off simple but much like classic card games like *Magic the Gathering* the more you get into it the more you realise there are subtle layers of design. Each model is lovingly rendered and strongly reminiscent of the source material. My favourite is *King Kondo* - the giant ape. Not only does he look fierce he also plays really easily. It's fun to play as an adult and I gather it's mind-blowing for kids who love stompy monsters. And what kid doesn't love stompy monsters?

Last, but by no means least, is *King of Tokyo*. We've talked about this *Richard Garfield* game a few times in past columns and if you haven't played it by now then what is stopping you? It's a weird mix of monster smashing fun and *Yahtzee*, and it is truly one of the best family friendly games out on the market today.

The aim of the game is to be the first to 20 Victory Points. The easiest way to get these points is to enter Tokyo with your cardboard monster and start smashing things. Sadly whilst in Tokyo you can't heal and the other monsters will try and beat you up.

All activity depends on the roll of 6

special dice. The faces of each die are the numbers one, two or three, and symbols that mean heal, damage or energy. You get to roll the dice three times and though you have to roll all the dice the first time you can choose to leave others alone during the re-rolls. At the end of the re-rolls, if you get three of a kind with the numbers you get that number in victory points. You get healed for each 'healing' dice you keep, you get energy for each energy dice you keep, and for each damage die you hang on to you get to hurt whichever monster is in Tokyo at the time.

Do enough damage to your foe and you'll end up in Tokyo yourself. You get victory points for staying in Tokyo but you're very likely to die if you stay too long. There are also upgrades you can take that represent radioactive breath and extra heads - you get these by spending energy.

That might sound a bit complex, so let me boil it down to simple terms: roll dice. Point and laugh at friends. Yell "King of Tokyo" at your buddies. Get horribly murdered by your friends for going off half-cocked. Then do it all again. It's fast, it's simple and it's essentially a simple dice game with an excellent theme. Their expansion *Power Up* introduces extra power cards that allow you to become more powerful in a very specific way. It makes the gameplay more tactical but not by much. What it really does is add just enough of a twiddle to gameplay to keep it a bit fresher for longer. *Halloween* introduces more monsters, more cards and costumes. The latter is a special kind of power that can be easily foiled by other players. The expansion adds more of a competitive element to the whole thing, keeping it fresher for longer.

All this talk of huge monsters has reminded me that though I may never be able to turn into *Godzilla*, I am a massive geek, which will have to do for now.

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STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE

MCM BIRMINGHAM

COMIC CON

WORDS: ANDREW KEATES
PHOTOS: ANNE DAVIES



TRAVEL

Why is it that Birmingham always feels like it's in a galaxy far, far away? Especially when you live in London?

Yet, by the time I had made myself comfortable on a Virgin Express train from London Euston to Birmingham, tucked into my complimentary snack box and avoided potentially fatal burns from a watery cup of coffee, caught up with an episode of a popular 1980s series that I had found myself watching thanks to the joys of Netflix (yes, it was *Knight Rider*) and after just over an hour, my train had not only arrived as if by warp speed to Birmingham International, but within ten minutes, I was already inside the enormous Birmingham NEC nearly being trampled on by a platoon of very well dressed Storm Troopers.

Sadly, I was only able to arrive quite late on Saturday afternoon, as we had only planned to review from Sunday onwards, however the buzz from the stampeding, well-costumed and high-spirited attendees was intoxicating. It seemed to me that every single person had stayed until the very last minute to enjoy their Saturday experience, whilst juggling sacks full of unique memorabilia to rival Kivas Fajo's collection in one hand and portfolios of highly prized signed autographs from the wealth of guests this event has attracted in the other. I even

noticed a gaggle of girls kissing one of their signed photographs. It was clear everyone had enjoyed themselves and this was one of the best arrays of costumes I have ever seen at an event.

After being expertly and passionately looked after by the excellent staff of MCM, within only ten minutes of leaving this carnival of monsters, I arrived and was greeted by a bunch of monsters that were far less friendly at the Novotel (Birmingham International Airport).

ACCOMMODATION

After paying far too much for a 'superior room', I didn't expect to be staying in such a cluttered and clumsy layout as you might find when designing the bathroom whilst playing *The Sims*, yet even then, you wouldn't be stupid enough to have a separate toilet, bathroom and push a random sofa up against a bed which would make a brig look glamorous. The lighting seemed appropriate for a Cardassian interrogation chamber and the view would have been improved if they had asked the girl from *The Ring* to draw what she thought the surface of the moon looked like and hung it in front of the prison-like windows similar to what you might find in Azkaban.

The only saving grace at the Novotel, was their Elements Restaurant, which

served one of the finest rump steaks I've had in quite some time and a pear-crème-brûlée that was so good I nearly ordered another. I didn't. Honest. My advice for accommodation after this year's event is to get to know the head chef of the Novotel and see if he will deliver to your TIE fighter located in a nearby carpark.

THE EVENT

When I was a little boy I used to love a car boot sale. I remember rummaging through boxes in the desperate hope of finding a Playmates Romulan Warbird, flicking through mountains of records dreaming there might be a Leonard Nimoy LP at the bottom of the pile and checking every second hand jewelry stand hoping to re-discover the Metebelis crystal. Sadly, I was only ever disappointed. Until now, where every stall had something that made my eyes a little bit wider and my wallet a little bit lighter.

If you can imagine a typical dealers room that you might find at a typical convention and multiply it by twenty, that might give you an inkling into what this enormous event is like, but what makes this event truly special is not just the enormity of dealers working with the organisers, but the huge variety of eclectic, high-quality and exciting products available to buy, rather than the current, typical, mass-produced toys and games you'd expect to see (although they are certainly there if you're after some very early Christmas shopping).

Whilst trekking down endless lanes of stalls and exhibits, I found hand-made flux capacitors and bespoke fantasy jewelry, impossible to find autographs and iconic/lost collectibles from the past, interactive displays and exclusive film memorabilia exclusive to this event, even a TARDIS to have your photographs taken with and a very exciting live display of *Robot Wars*. It was like walking into the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts and I would have almost certainly ended up emptying my vault at Gringotts with all that was available to buy.

Another really exciting addition to this gigantic event is the vast array of different comic book artists and their respective companies offering not only original artwork and comics to buy, but their contentment to simply sit and chat with fans of their work. The same is true of the guests in attendance who seemed very relaxed and content to have a natter about their respective involvement with the world of cult entertainment and scribble their name on a large range of glossy photographs. Special mention should go to *Fantom Films*, who brought a gaggle of classic Doctor Who actors who were certainly the most charming of the lot, especially Terry Malloy, Peter Purves and Fraser Hines.

The only disappointing element to this event was by only attending on Sunday, there was a distinct lack of guests compared with the line-up from the previous day, although that was made very clear on all promotional media. I was

also disappointed that there was a lack of things to do. You can only spend so much time walking up and down aisles before you feel like a laboratory rat hunting down an original Palitoy K9, instead of cheese. But I suppose that's down to taste. I'm the kind of convention goer that loves a party, lots of talks and unique events. But in saying that it was very clear that everyone attending was making their own fun rather than being spoonfed as you might find at other events. I've also been told that their next event in London will include a party and I can't wait to see what that adds to the experience.

In short, my advice would be to follow this simple itinerary... Create and wear the best costume you possibly can, go on the Saturday and show it off, collect your autographs and meet as many of the guests as you possibly can, then scout out everything you want to buy and finally on the Sunday, order a cargo container and prepare to buy a second home to house it all. +

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INTERVIEW: ANNETTE BADLAND

WORDS: ANDREW KEATES

Did you watch *Doctor Who* as a child?

William Hartnell and Patrick Troughton were my first Doctors. So I go way back to the beginning. I did the usual thing of hiding behind the sofa. It was very particular then as it is now. It's evolved over the years, but it was very specific and very different from what we were watching on television. Even though I may not remember specific stories, I do remember the fear and feelings it generated.

Did you ever think you would be a part of the *Doctor Who* universe?

Not at all. I never anticipated any of this, because as an actor you just look at the parts you're offered and either accept or reject them. But I knew by it being Russell [T. Davies] that it was going to be gold.

How did the opportunity come about to work on *Doctor Who*?

Russell wrote Boom Town especially for me. They filmed the first few episodes in the first regeneration of *Doctor Who* in the summer, and then around Christmas time the script arrived and there it was... Boom Town. It was such a glorious gift.

How do you react when you're cast as a *Slythine* and then read the character description?

You laugh! And embrace it in all its glorious parts! I guess, if Margaret had just been a farting alien, then perhaps it might have been embarrassing. But the character really ran the gambit. You know, people still won't get in the lift with me! But, I do enjoy terrifying small boys in supermarkets by just touching my forehead and watching them squirm a little bit.

In the later episode, there was a great Margaret. Did you have any input into the role development with Russell T. Davies?

I think it was a combination of the two of us. The rejection and humility was in the script, but I suppose I imbued it with an underbelly that someone else may not have given it, especially in the long scene in the restaurant. Margaret was written as the first character to challenge this Doctor [Christopher Eccleston]. But I guess that's why Russell asked me to do it, because he probably knew I would put that under there, rather than just taking it on the surface.

After having such a vast career in stage, film and television, how does it feel to be known by a whole generation as an alien, rather than some of your other iconic roles?

Great to be known for something!



And this is international and I love and embrace the parts I do. And yes, it is hard sometimes when some people remember you for things you didn't particularly treasure. But I loved Boom Town and I was very honoured to be given that.

Are there any parts that you have auditioned for in the fantasy genre that you didn't get?

No, not that I can think of.

Not even Delores Umbridge from *Harry Potter*? Because I always thought it was going to be you when I was reading the books...

Oh, I am so tired of people mentioning her! Well, they made a big mistake didn't they? And I know Imelda too [Annette laughs in good humour]. No, [Imelda Staunton] was very good... But it should have been me! So many people say that to me. They didn't even see me. But there you go.

Tell us about *Wizards Vs Aliens*, your current project, which is also written by Russell T. Davies. Are there any similarities to *Doctor Who*?

It's extraordinary. Often actors look down on children's series, but I think they're often the most imaginative, interesting and committed pieces of work. I know with *Wizards*, it's genocide and big moral issues sitting under these stories that we're exploring. I think if you're giving that to children, you're giving them life guidance that only good writing can give. +

Origin

By Ed Fortune

Call me Origin. My kind don't have names, not in the way you mean it, but in this age of heroes and flashy costumes, Origin will do. In this melodramatic modern age, if anyone knew what I was, then they would call me a villain. There isn't a so-called superhero in the city of New York who hasn't regretted meeting me, but then, that's the point. I am certainly not a hero, not in the way that mortals define it, and yet without me the world would have been destroyed by madmen long ago.

If my kind has to stand sentinel against the forces of darkness, then I see no reason why the race of man should not have to suffer along with us. I am the anvil on which fate forges heroes. I am the fallen angel of heroism, the demon of vigilantes and the patron saint of villains.

I remember my first, of course, you always do. John Harner was only 8 years old when I met him. A sweet boy with blonde hair and blue eyes, his father's frame and his mother's mind. His mother, of course, was Doctor Harner, the almost famous robotics engineer. The father was not as blessed with brains or beauty. Once he was the darling of the college football scene, but that would not serve my needs. An uncared for piece of turf and a hungover surgeon were easy to arrange, and soon he was out of action, just another promising sports career ruined due to an injury. With no real skills, the only work he could get was as a security guard. Really, his wife earned so much that he didn't have to take the job, but it only took the gentlest of nudging from passing strangers to encourage such a pride filled fool to don a nylon uniform. It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is to push the strands of fate together.

A disguise here, a conversation there, and suddenly, father, mother and their darling son were all in the bank on that fateful day. The mother and boy were there for a special event of course, the bank was unveiling some sort of scheme or other, just another one of the petty games men with money and power play in the city. The raid on the bank almost never happened,

the Carnaby twins were beginning to get cold feet. Several of their crew had already left after a previous robbery had almost gone awry. Still, taking the guise of a beautiful woman and being more than a little bit generous with the champagne was enough to lure those two thugs back into the easy life of crime. Shifting shape is the least of my talents, though the twins were so inept that I had to adopt another identity, one that could hold a shotgun and didn't ask too many questions.

The raid went wrong, of course. The brothers lost their nerve, the alarm was tripped too early, and the security guard was so terribly brave. John's father saved eight lives that day with his courage, daring and big strong arms. He even saved his son. It's a pity, really, that he couldn't save his own life, or that of his wife. But then, that was the point. John watched his father and mother die by the hands of criminal scum.

I watched with pride as John Harner grew up, though of course, he never knew me. John was a good boy and he grew up into a brilliant man; his father's brawn and courage, and his mother's looks and intelligence, as well as his mother's experimental battle armour. You see, Mr Harner spends his spare time as Jack Hammer, the blunt tool of justice.

Imagine if you will, what the world would be like if Jack Hammer, the hero that brought even the mighty Doctor Darkness to his knees, did not exist. My superiors tell me that Mr Harner was destined to be some sort of Broadway performer before that day. I am as fond of the odd song and dance routine as anyone else, but I am sure that you can agree that this way, the world gets a hero. Yes, he suffers, and yes, he faces death and tragedy almost every day, but then others don't have to. The world is better this way.

I know him to be a true hero, of course. About a year ago, I adopted the form of his parents' killer. Each time he saw me, it was only fleeting. Just enough of a distraction for him to pause between doing the right thing or pursuing me. Every time he took the heroes path, he saved the child, put out the fire, and punched the villain. He let me go because he had to, because there

were more pressing things to do. I suppose you could call it cruel, but I had to be sure. Eventually, of course, I gave him the closure he needed. He had the choice; he faced his parents' killer in an abandoned warehouse, with no one else around for miles. I begged, I pleaded, and I said all the wrong things. I did everything I could to tempt him from the path of justice. I could hear his teeth grind when he took me in. I could smell his anger and his contempt. I was made to find those things delicious, and my heart leapt to see him suffer just enough for the sins of the world. I vanished into the justice system after that.

Jack Hammer was my first, but he certainly was not my last; there is not a hero in this city who has not been tested by me. None of them would thank me; I am not just the faceless man with the gun, I am also the angry commuter who curses the name of a hero within his earshot, the slovenly caf who ruins the heroine's blouse before that crucial interview, the traffic warden who stops the young adventurer from getting to a date on time. They have to suffer, that is what makes them heroes.

If these people were every allowed to relax, they might reconsider their lives. They might stop pushing themselves that little bit harder, relax for a moment, and then, evil would thrive. Instead, because there are heroes in the world, the foolish and thuggish seem to respond in kind. Take Doctor Darkness; a madman with a remarkable machine that lets him manipulate the shadows as if he was some creature from hell. Ignoring the fact that is not the role of mortals to possess such power, the foolish and vain man feels the need to dress in black satin and declare his plans from the rooftops. Had he simply gotten on with his schemes, I'm sure no one would be any the wiser, but instead, he runs out into the street, straight into the hammers of justice.

Maybe John Harner did go into song and dance after all, albeit a darker sort of theatrics.

My current project was a young man who goes by the name of Alexander Gaff, though when he patrols the streets at night, he calls himself The Goth. Orphans are always the hardest

to motivate, but in this case it could not be helped; his father was some sort of adventurer and his mother wasn't even human, some sort of Atlantean princess or anthropomorphic personification of magic or other. Even creatures such as me have difficulty keeping track of such things, this world is rotten with mad magical monsters claiming to be this or that thing, it was almost a pleasure to get rid of her and leave the babe in the hands of social services.

It wasn't hard to keep him an orphan; his father has been looking for him for a while I gather, but paperwork burns so easy, and of course, every time an orphanage catches fire it gives my other projects the chance to shine.

Abandoned as a child, passed from orphanage to orphanage, it hasn't been easy to keep him on the side of light. Too many times has he come close to drawing upon his dark heritage and sending his tormentors to hell, but he has been good. The right sort of encouragement in the right places, and of course, smuggling occult tomes into the library has crafted this moody young man into the sort of hero this city needs. New York has plenty of brave men and women with fists of justice, thanks to me, but this one should have been my masterpiece.

Pride of course, is a sin. Even beings like myself are prone to sins, and when you are as glorious and as cunning as me, it's hard not to take a little pride in your work. I was very proud of that final tome I had given him. I had filled it with enough hints of power, enough empty promises. I have to test these heroes, otherwise they will fail when we need them most.

The boy would draw upon his arcane might and I would appear to him in the form of some great devil, so I could tempt him one more time. A bit

close to the bone, maybe, but at the time it seemed perfect. The tome contained two spells, both similar to each other. One would grant great power, but at the cost of many innocent lives. The other would banish a great evil from the city for a while, but at great personal cost. Both fake of course, but if my prey chose the darker rite, then my plan was to eat him. Waste not want not, I always say.

I lurked in spirit world, waiting for the boy to show. The components for the ritual were brilliant, of course. The bone of an innocent, the tears of a killer, gold dust, that sort of thing. Items that are easier for criminals to take than heroes to find. I had not had the time to follow his every move,

but I could smell sin upon these things. So far, so good. He had also dressed in costume; flowing robes and body armour. I do wonder if there is a very rich seamstress somewhere, making all these wonderful garments.

Somewhere, a bell began to ring out midnight. It wasn't in the ritual but you can't fault him for style. He began to chant, long, fast and low, calling out the hundred names that would bind something like me. There was real power in those words, and it was only then that I began to worry that I had made things a little bit too authentic. I appeared, in the form of a creature of brimstone and fire, the shape of a lesser thing I knew from long ago.

"You called" I said, in a deep voice filled with menace. I made the shadows flicker for effect, and let the air grow cold. "What is your bidding, what dark pact do you wish from me?" He smiled, and for a moment, I felt something new. Fear.

The boy spread his arms wide. "Oh" he said, "it's not for me. It's for a friend. A great evil. Banished for all time from this world. A patricide and arsonist. You."

The next thing I knew, I had been hit, very, very hard. Nothing mortal should have been able to hurt me. It felt good. New. Interesting.

Looking up, I saw John Harner, ancient runes that ward away evil etched into his armour.

In the corner, I heard the low chanting of a banishing ritual. Jack hit me again, and then again. I started to scream as my body caught flame and turned to ash. In a flash, I was gone. Banished.

I know he didn't see my grin. The two heroes had bonded over the victory, and of course they didn't see past my trickery. The seeds of a team sown, another origin story.



Art: Rylian Cavell

PAUL MOUNT'S



This month TV ZONE bemoans Channel Five's treatment of HELIX and races to the finish with THE WALKING DEAD...

Pity poor *Helix*. There it was, minding its own business on the UK's

Channel Five, originally sitting in the Monday night 10pm slot which did decent business last year for the first season of Stephen King's *Under The zzzz...* (sorry... reflex action) *Dome* and suddenly, after six episodes (of thirteen) it's... gone. *Helix* is unceremoniously shunted off to a rather insulting midnight slot before being banished to the TV hinterland of 5*, some non-terrestrial Channel Five offshoot where, it seems, underperforming US dramas are sent to die. It's an ignominious fate for the latest show from Ronald D. Moore (although, for the sake of accuracy, the original concept was refined by Moore from an idea by first-time Cameron Porsandeh), engineer of the 21st century reboot of *Battlestar Galactica* and a series on which its makers, the Syfy channel have understandably pinned high hopes. But perhaps Five's hopes were a little

too high; like many US genre shows, a dedicated and enthusiastic cult audience was the best *Helix* could ever really hope for - this is, after all, a show set in the snowy Arctic wastes with a bunch of boffins and soldiers fighting against a lethal virus and not Five's preferred diet of cheap documentaries about benefit cheats or lazy builders.

But then Five have current and worrying form for routinely dumping US genre shows, having recently announced that they won't be screening any more episodes of *The Walking Dead* (only like one of the most popular shows on UK television) or fantasy hit *Once Upon A Time* which is also probably very good. As genre fans we rant and rave, of course, and curse these shortsighted and usually terrestrial TV channels who make the effort of securing hot new American shows, transmit them as quickly as possible following their US debuts, thereby fostering the impression that

this is a big and important acquisition for them. Then the numbers come in, only the usual SF hardcore are watching and suddenly it's a graveyard slot and a documentary about police car chases has nabbed your prestigious, showcase place in the schedule. But the reality is that commercial channels have rigorously commercial considerations and shows that don't perform are liable to get yanked and replaced with something cheaper and more likely to hold a steady audience. Commercial channels can't sell worthwhile advertising space in shows which are losing viewers and the bald, cold truth is that *Helix* in the UK saw its ratings drop from 1.62 million for its first episode to just under 750,000 for its fourth. In some ways perhaps it's not surprising that episodes five and six found themselves kicked back to midnight before the rest of the series was suspended to be screened elsewhere later in the year.

So Five have gone on a bit of an axing spree lately and, frustrating as we might find it as fans of this sort of stuff, it's probably something we have to accept in a multi-channel world. Five's screenings of *The Walking Dead*, usually months after their UK debut on the Fox Network, were only ever going to attract stragglers who hadn't already seen the show one way or another (i.e. other ways are available) and were probably only watching out of curiosity value anyway - or maybe because they quite liked that nice Egg out of *This Life* (ask your parents). This one's tougher to stomach because, viewing figures or not, *The Walking Dead* remains the biggest (and best? See later) genre show on TV at the moment and, if nothing else, you'd imagine there'd be certain kudos to be had even in Five's sloppy seconds screenings. But it's inarguable that the show is stale by the time it turns up on Five so the bragging rights are clearly less braggy than on Fox where first run episodes, now screened within twenty-four hours of their US debut, can nab around a million viewers for an otherwise little-watched channel.





I suppose the concern is that the low turn-out and low support for our kind of shows just supports the contention - in the UK at least - that genre telly is an unpopular ghetto and it's a safer bet to just commission another series about a quirky detective who doesn't play by the rules or a cutting edge drama set in, say, a hospital or doctor's surgery. Or maybe our imported genre shows (because, let's face it, the brief flurry of interest in homegrown fantasy telly engendered by the return of *Doctor Who* has long since faded) are better served away from the glare of terrestrial TV and where they can be allowed to trundle along with the core audience they'd attract anyway/anywhere. None of which is really good news for the likes of *Helix*, a show which should probably have never pitched up on Five in the first place because it was never likely to become the next *X-Files* and it certainly wasn't going to attract even the acceptably above-average numbers of *Under the Duvet* (sorry, something about that show just makes me think of... well, yawning mainly).

On to *Helix*, then... and I'm conscious that the show's unfortunate fate at the

hands of ruthless British TV executive bastards appears to have become more important than the show itself. Perhaps it's understandable, though as the show, whilst intriguing and clearly destined to be more than the sum of its parts, isn't quite turning out to be what many, myself included, might have expected from the creepy and atmospheric teaser trailer released last summer. But I'm pleased that my initial impression of the show as a sort of *Zombies on Ice* (a joke from issue 398's column I was so pleased with I felt I had to repeat it this month just in case it had passed you by) was a bit wide of the mark. Okay, so there are sort of zombies in it, victims of a second virus at loose on the Arctic Biosystems research base where the action is set, but the show thankfully isn't so much concerned with rampaging blood-crazed virus victims as the wider conspiracy behind the whole situation, a story which is clearly going to power the series for a while. (Yes, Channel Five, the show's done well enough in the States to earn a second series commission.) At first blush the series seems achingly traditional and disappointingly-generic as Dr Alan Farragut (Billy Campbell... he was

The Rocketeer!) and his crack medical team turn up at the base where his brother Peter (Neil Napier) has been infected by a mysterious disease. Attempts to contain the virus by quarantining those infected look doomed to failure and it soon transpires that there are other forces at work on the base and that the release of the virus might not be entirely accidental.

There's lots of good stuff to admire in *Helix*. I like the cheesy muzak-style theme sting which promises something safe, clinical and anodyne and manages to completely subvert expectations. I like the high production values and decent CGI and, despite the fact that every show on the box does it, I quite like the hints of a deeper story and more intriguing mythology. I don't much like some of the soap opera elements; Alan's team includes his own top boffin ex-wife Julia (Kyra Zagorsky) who - gasp - had an affair with his sickly brother. I also didn't much like perky comedy relief smart-mouth scientist Doreen Boyle (Catherine Lemieux) but - spoiler ahoy - she's no longer a problem by the end of episode four. The show avoids dreary *LOST*-style character flashbacks thanks to the odd hallucinatory sequence which might or might not be real and might offer distorted and misleading depictions of what might or might not be relevant backstory. On the downside, there are probably a few too many faceless and forgettable characters - I'm not entirely sure who some of these anxious looking women are - and there's not really yet enough originality on display to shake off those uneasy comparisons with the likes of *The Thing* and *The Andromeda Strain*. Genre fans expecting something edgier from Moore might be disappointed by the safeness and predictability of it all but I suspect that *Helix* has some surprises up its icy sleeve and that alone is enough to keep me watching despite the best efforts of Channel Five to spoil my frosty fun. The show's turned up on 5* on Saturday evenings now, where it's running again from the first episode and I sincerely hope that the six of us who quite like it and have found it will stick with it to the bitter end.



THE WALKING DEAD

So, best show on the box? On the evidence of the extraordinary, breathtaking and occasionally taboo-bustin' fourth season, there's certainly a case to be made. Fortunately, clearly not interested in becoming a safe, predictable series with its characters rooted in one location, season four set out to dismantle the 'prison refuge' status quo of the third year almost from the moment it began. With Rick (Andrew Lincoln) and co. having survived an attack by David Morrissey's vicious Governor at the end of season three, the group are quickly threatened by a debilitating and potentially-fatal flu outbreak and those unaffected have no choice but to venture out into the zombie-infested outside world to try and find medication. Meanwhile the Governor is a devastated, ruined man and he quickly falls in with a new family group where he seems, for a while, to regain his humanity. But the monster is never far from the surface and before long he's in a position of power again and he's out for revenge against Rick's group...

The Walking Dead just doesn't pull any punches. It keeps its audience not only on the edge of its seat - literally, that's pretty much where I am week after week - but it also refuses to ever take the easy option. This is a world gone to shit where the survivors are just as dangerous (perhaps even moreso) as the undead and where no one is ever a heartbeat away from a violent death. Season four is perhaps **The Walking Dead** at its bleakest; there is literally no light in these people's lives, just the constant grind of staying alive for another day. By the end of the first half of the season, the prison had been overrun, a much-beloved character had been decapitated and Rick's group had been scattered to the winds. The second batch of episodes has seen the series really defying not only whatever conventions it had set itself but also pretty much the conventions of TV itself. Episodes have focused on disparate factions from Rick's group, miles apart and



yet all heading in the same direction courtesy of a potential sanctuary called 'Terminus'. But these episodes beautifully (and in some cases, finally) put some flesh on the bones of characters who had sometimes been little more than names in a cast list. With the focus removed from Rick and his son ("Carrrrr!") - they appear in just a handful of the back-half of the season's episodes - the new 'on the road' format allows us to spend time with Daryl, Tyreese, Michonne, Beth (she has dialogue now!), Glen, Maggie and the returning Carol (banished by Rick earlier in the season). Lovers are separated and reunited, strangers become friends, some die shockingly ('The Grove', presenting initially as a routine filler episode quickly develops into something much darker and much, much more horrifying) and the fates of some are yet to be resolved; but the show is never less than unremittingly, sometimes unbearably dark and its

brutal and almost casual violence remains wincingly unrelenting and gleefully inventive.

Minor quibbles aside - I'm just a little tired of seeing everyone trudging through woods week after week - **The Walking Dead** is in a very good place as season four ends (even if its characters aren't - 'Terminus', inevitably, isn't all it might have been hoped to be). But this frankly brilliant second half of the season has seized its opportunity to really develop its characters so that they now seem to matter much more and now we can really care about what happens to them rather than just wait to find out which one gets their leg bitten next. **The Walking Dead**, four seasons in, is just about as unmissable as modern telly can get. Shame no one told the brains at Channel Five.

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Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount.

STARBURST

TISE VAHIMAGI (1950-2013)

Tise Vahimagi was there at the very beginning with Dez Skinn and John Brosnan. It's probably fair to say that without him, STARBURST would have been a very different creature. An avid film and fantasy fan, Tise first met Dez Skinn in 1976 through a mutual friend, the artist Rob Lee. This led to Tise collaborating on *Monster Mag*, then *House of Hammer* before joining STARBURST to launch the influential column TV Zone. Tise was one of the

key members of the STARBURST family, and helped to shape the early tone of the magazine. For anyone into cult TV, his knowledge of the subject was infectious, and was yours for the bargain price of only 50p a month. He went on to write numerous reference books, but is best known for the superb bible of US TV, *The American Vein*.

TV ZONE continues in honour of Tise, we hope he's tuning in, wherever he is...



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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE



Horrible, slimy git. Constantine looks a bit shifty as well!

I have wrestled control back of this column from my eager offspring, and normal service is resumed. Regrettably it is indeed normal service as, even though this is our landmark 400th issue, and the end of my third year writing this column – it begins with the worst kind of hatchet job. It seriously pains me that I have to add these guys to the graveyard that contains *The Man of Steel*, the entire *Twilight* Saga, and that slaphead Kingsley. I am about to descend to a new low and with a heavy heart give the Muppets a bit of a kicking.

Now anyone who regularly reads this column or listens to the Starburst Radio Show ought to know that I am a massive fan of these little fellas. Always have been. Even in the worst of their movies I have always found something to appreciate. 2012 reignited the zeitgeist with *The Muppets* recapturing the magic that was getting slightly more difficult to sell to a younger generation. One that probably didn't get what all the fuss was about. The frog and co. were back with not only one of the best Muppet movies, but possibly one of the best musical comedies ever made. I have rarely seen a more obvious labour of love on the silver screen. An end product that even the suits at Disney had not been able to dilute, and the result was a well-deserved hit on both sides of the channel. *Muppets Most Wanted* is sadly nowhere near as good, lacking all of the feel good factor

and warmth, feeling like a rote project by comparison. As a Muppet movie it is a runt in the Muppet litter, as a follow-up to *The Muppets* it's an absolute disaster.

It is actually tough to nail exactly what is wrong with *Muppets Most Wanted*. Everything and pretty much everyone on screen just falls flat. Ricky Gervais continues to flounder around like a drunk trying to find a light switch, as he fails yet again to transfer any of his obvious comedy talent onto the big screen. Even Tina Fey was a letdown. Usually just watching her pull funny facial expressions is amusing. Here she barely raises a laugh as gulag prison guard Nadya. The movie seems to exude an atmosphere that saps the gags as soon as they leave someone's mouth. In the previous instalment we had Jason Segel and Amy Adams (far better suited to this environment than hanging around with her toy boy "Kryptonian") – two genuinely muppetry people. They are sorely missed in this movie and these endless, often pointless cameos do nothing to disguise that. Like appearing on *The Morecambe and Wise Show* in the '70s, making a cameo appearance with the Muppets was a sign you had arrived, and were part of pop culture. That is far from the case here. Rather than looking chuffed to be joining in the fun, most of these guys look as awkward as Shane Ritchie re-watching his *Jim'll Fix It* tribute show. I just felt so sorry for poor old Christoph doing his surname no favours. I didn't

know who wanted to cry more, me or him. Has anyone ever looked more awkward. As for Lady Gaga, it really is time for her to piss off now!

As bad as this sounds, the worst was yet to come. In the final stages of this big budget TV special we are introduced to the worst thing I've seen in cinemas since Ben Kingsley. A bizarre visual effect known as "The Wall". At Tina Fey's gulag (great name for a bar in Tribeca), you get punished by being stuck to an icy wall. Resulting in web-cammed celebs being cut and pasted together, in order to lip sync the closing song, like they were in a subpar Jackie Chan movie. If I were a religious bloke I would probably describe this visual as ungodly. I just sat there staring in disbelief. Perhaps this looks good after 15 joints, but as someone just scraping by on the highs of life I just can't get my head around it.

So what about the music? Apart from a good opening number (and even that has its flaws – more later...) I was not that impressed. There is nothing here to come close to the award winning "Man or Muppet" from the previous outing. The Ricky Gervais and Constantine duo, "I'm Number One" also further demonstrated the weird atmosphere permeating the entire proceedings. Coming across as a weird dream sequence. This slightly off key tone is at the heart of the problems, and does seem to infect the entire runtime. It made all the more puzzling by the fact that (barring Segel), it is pretty much the entire team from *The Muppets* that were responsible for all of this. Perhaps Jason Segel, and his desire to bring the Muppets back to the mainstream, was a potent source of inspiration? As it stands, director James Bobin and co-writer Nicholas Stoller simply failed to recapture that lightning in a bottle time around.

It wasn't a complete waste of time. The gag of Constantine himself really soared, and pretty much saved this from being a really painful watch. Every time he was onscreen I was suitably entertained. Constantine was the oasis in this felt desert. Constantine is also a great visual construct for understanding what is wrong here. Looking the part but pretty flawed up close. Flaws do seem to flourish in this movie. Flaws such as not bothering to alter the lyrics to the aforementioned



In the UK, officers from Operation Yewtree probably think they've seen it all. They need to check out some of the shit that Captain America and his young sidekick Bucky got up to back in the day...

opening number which still proclaims that the movie is called *The Muppets*... Again! – despite being renamed midway through production. Kinda like watching *Star Wars*: Episode VI and reading *Revenge of the Jedi* still on the title crawl. Jeez, couldn't anyone even be bothered changing it? Or had the \$50 million budget already been blown on all the gruesome cameos?

Even with its dying moments it still manages to offend with a vomit-inducing animated fireworks credits sequence, which finally made me switch off and think about dead friends – probably not the reaction they were looking for! As this has probably bombed, the poor fellas will be back to the TV for now. I can only say that next time around maybe no gags about crap sequels, and maybe do a movie about the Muppets and not around the Muppets. It worked well in 1979 and 2012.

One of my favourite movies of 2012 and probably my favourite entry in the Marvel Cinematic Universe so far is *Captain America: The First Avenger*. A superb WWII romp from Joe Johnston who delivered the massively underrated '91 movie, *The Rocketeer*. Considering how many shonky versions of Cap I had to endure growing up I was actually shocked at how well Marvel pulled this off. Great cast, great story, perfect pacing, and that delightful musical number by Disney legend Alan Menken. This will always be one of my favourite comic book adaptations. The fact that they found a way to craft this in a post 9-11 world where some people are not exactly enamoured with the iconography of the star spangled banner, made this all the more impressive. Any sequel was a challenge. Especially when the decision was made to bring the time period forward after only the first movie. I am very happy to say that *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is a very solid entry in the MCU and a decent sequel to the first movie. The

story is captivating: Evans, Johansson, and Jackson are bang on the money. Even newcomer Anthony Mackie has a decent stab at making the slightly absurd Falcon believable. The action is frenetic, and the effects are top notch. My only problems are more to do with the current approach of genre blockbusters in general, and the "swiss cheese trilogy" approach favoured by Nolan and contemporaries, which prefer to tell the origin story then skip straight to a big climax.

Bond recently had his origin told over two movies, then jumped to a burnt out Bond with his career over in *Skyfall*. The holy Nolan did the same with his *Dark Knight* Trilogy. Origin over two movies then presenting us with a bat-knackered hero at the end of his career in the third and final instalment. *CA:TWS* is far better than these movies but has still gone from origin to a present day epic story about the return of his sidekick that Marvel Comics held off telling for over half a century. We just never seem to get the actual adventures in-between. This does reduce the dramatic impact of some of the big moments. I personally think they missed a trick here. I would have preferred to see this saga told over four movies. Two set in WWII and two set in modern day. The impact of his enforced hibernation at the end of the second movie and his separation from Peggy would have been more pronounced. He could have been found in *Avengers Assemble*, and we could have waited until the second Cap movie to clear up the mystery of how he got frozen in time, again creating more impact to the resurrection. This would have given us more time to hang out with Peggy, Howard Stark and the rest of the embryonic S.H.I.E.L.D. ensemble, and a few more adventures with the Howling Commandos. Could he have joined The Invaders even?

CA:TSW swaps classical Nazi bashing for

a terrorist obsessed modern day where the enemy could be just about anyone. A world where paranoia is a vital skillset. The saga begins with a run of the mill hostage situation involving Georges Batroc. Thankfully not going by his comic book moniker of Batroc the Leaper. Batroc was a villain only slightly less pathetic than Daredevil's laughable nemesis The Stiltman. A bad guy so lame that once the writers woke up to this, in a highly amusing issue, Stiltman dropped off his extendable metal legs with Daredevil, packed in a little carry case, and retired so he could stop getting his arse handed to him. Unlike his wisecracking counterpart, Batroc leaps on. That is his power. He leaps. He leaps quite high. Why is he in this movie? Not a clue.

Cap soon realises that all is not well with S.H.I.E.L.D. What with a failing TV series and corruption everywhere. He then has to take on the bad guys that have perhaps been around him all along, and then face off against the formidable threat of The Winter Soldier. Seriously, Cap has very little time for a breather once the mayhem kicks in. Action is dispensed thick and fast with set piece after set piece. My favourite being the lift sequence. Even though you have seen some of this sequence in the trailer, the finished scene is a great cinema moment. The James Bond camp should be watching these movies for inspiration instead of endlessly re-watching the *Bourne* movies. The major revelation of the identity of The Winter Soldier is the lynch pin of this saga. This was a revelation that rocked all of us comic fans to our core back in 2005. Only the return of Uncle Ben in *Spider-Man* could have made us wet our pants more than this. Sadly this is where this accelerated movie culture proves to undermine an otherwise superb yarn.

I do sympathise with Marvel. They want to tell this modern and epic story as soon as possible. Before Chris Evans buggers off after his third and final "pay day" instalment. The story of Bucky's return is fraught with a few problems however. Firstly there is the factor that he only died a movie ago. A lengthier stay in WWII would have had much more impact. Secondly there is the problem of Cap's "Robin" – Bucky himself.

Once Batman took Robin under his cape in Detective Comics #38, way back in 1940,



putting children directly ~~into~~ the path of bullets became all the rage. It was inevitable that Cap would have a similar sidekick. Unlike Batman, he got his in his first issue, when Bucky caught Rogers changing into Cap. The cheeky blighter then blackmailed him into making him his partner in order to maintain his then secret identity. Bucky was Robin in all but name, and perished when both himself and Cap failed to stop Obama's, oh sorry, I meant to say Baron Zemo's drone plane. Causing Cap to fall into the frozen waters, from which he would awaken to rescue Marvel's new Avengers comic. The lunacy of having a child hanging around with the US Army in WWII was pushing it even then. Clearly in a modern context, Marvel just couldn't do the movie Bucky as a superhero sidekick.

~~There is~~ what loses some of the ~~relevance~~ with Marvel having to relegate Bucky to being his bezzie mate. Which isn't quite as potent in mythological terms. Even now comics still have the edge when relaying the absurd.

I did find it interesting that the movie actually isn't based very much on Brubaker's Winter Soldier storyline, but is an adaptation of the 1988 Bob Harras six part epic **Nick Fury vs S.H.I.E.L.D.** six parter which was a favourite of mine. It's really clever how this Fury centric saga fits nicely into the Captain America storyline, and serves to propel both characters forward, whilst seriously shaking up the MCU. I cannot even begin to imagine the changes that will occur in the **S.H.I.E.L.D.** TV

series. Bold stuff indeed. Despite all these difficulties and character constraints, the Russo brothers do Marvel proud. I urge you to get out there and see what is definitely going to be one of the movies of the year. One that lives up to the spirit of the original, whilst providing you with a totally new aesthetic, environment, and characters. It's to the credit of everyone involved that it gels so seamlessly.



Jordan Royce can be contacted at Jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and co-hosts the Starburst Radio Show with Assistant Editor Kns Heys, Wednesdays 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International - www.fabradiointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast

Back in 1977, John Brosnan had been part of Dez Skinn's inner circle for quite some time, and it was only natural that he would be asked to bring his particular knowledge, wit, and writing flair to STARBURST. To be fair it was a really good fit, and his initial piece on **Star Wars** in issue 1 helped get the ball rolling. It was, however, going to take a while before the party really got started. We didn't have to wait very long, issue number 23 took things to a whole new level, and introduced us to the John Brosnan that most of us would know and love, and some of us would love to hate!

While the rest of the planet was gorging itself on **The Empire Strikes Back**, Mr Brosnan was less than impressed. His review in issue 23 dismissed it as a bit lacklustre, and wanted to stuff Yoda down the nearest black hole. Whether intended or otherwise the response (as we would later await with bated breath post any of his more scathing reviews), was swift and decisive, ranging from indignation to simple, and straightforward death threats. This was vintage Brosnan and would be repeated many times over many film properties he took a dislike to. With issue 27 he was granted his own column to unload some of these controversial opinions. Originally titled **"The Critic Strikes Back"**, then renamed **"It's Only a Movie"** with the following issue. The column, and John's blunt opinions, were the staple diet of many of our childhoods, showing us all that slavishly brown nosing the major studios was nowhere near as entertaining as sticking the boot in!

As a person John battled with depression, and probably didn't always understand the amount of affection he was held in by film aficionados the world over. To quote one of his favourite movies, **Blade Runner**, "the light that burns twice as bright burns half as long". John never made it to his 58th birthday, and, in a final bout of pathos, tragically died alone.

John Brosnan made us all aware that there is always humour to be had in any situation (especially when you are watching a really bad movie). Importantly he taught us not to take ourselves, or our hobby too seriously. We can all be grateful for that.

I enjoy writing this column, it's a pleasure. But I would gladly step aside just to see his name on that byline one last time. Goddammit John. You're a tough act to follow, mate.

Jordan M. Royce

JOHN RAYMOND BROSNAN
7th October 1947 - 11th April 2005

It is to his memory that
the continuation of this column
is respectfully dedicated.

"I would advise passengers who get nervous and upset when their sacred cows get bruised to keep their seat belts fastened up tight. As Bette Davis once said, 'It's going to be a bumpy ride' ". STARBURST, Issue 27.



LIEV SCHREIBER

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